

THE LIFE OF  
CHARLES LAMB  
BY E. V. LUCAS



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THE LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A WANDERER IN HOLLAND

A WANDERER IN LONDON

A WANDERER IN PARIS

THE OPEN ROAD

THE FRIENDLY TOWN

FIRESIDE AND SUNSHINE

CHARACTER AND COMEDY

THE GENTLEST ART

HER INFINITE VARIETY

LISTENER'S LURE

OVER BEMERTON'S

ONE DAY AND ANOTHER

GOOD COMPANY

A SWAN AND HER FRIENDS







*Mary & Charles Lamb  
from the painting by F. S. Cary in 1834.*



# THE LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB

BY

E. V. LUCAS

WITH THIRTY ILLUSTRATIONS

FIFTH EDITION, REVISED

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JOHN LEECH

THE LIFE OF

1813

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## PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

THE present edition is precisely the same as the original two-volume edition, save for the omission of several illustrations and four appendices, and the addition of certain corrections, a few new passages, a portrait of Thomas Manning, and a portrait of Joseph Paice now for the first time reproduced, which I owe to the courtesy of Miss Rhoda V. Malleison. I have also included a reproduction of the statuette so long considered to be Lamb, both by its original owner, the late Henry Willett, and by the officials of South Kensington Museum. Although its identity has been challenged, and I think very plausibly, it is interesting to have a record of the figure in this volume. Particulars of the statuette will be found on page 659.

As the years have passed on, and Charles Lamb, who wrote "for antiquity," has become more and more a treasured writer by posterity, the desire to learn of him and his sister all that can be learned—a desire prompted not by curiosity but by affection—has steadily increased; and the reply to this wish has been such that in all literature there is no figure, save perhaps Johnson, whom we know so well, and certainly none that is better loved.

It has been my aim to collect and fuse into a single narrative the sum of this scattered information. As in carrying out that task I have tried as far as possible to keep the story of Lamb's life in his own and his sister's words and in those of their contemporaries, my part will be found to be less that of author than of stage-manager. Thanks to the good sense of the Lambs' friends in preserving their letters, and to Lamb's own inveterate habit of autobiography ("the more my character comes to be known," he wrote, "the less will my veracity come to be suspected"), the task has not been a very difficult one.

I feel that a word is needed concerning our national disregard



of Charles and Mary Lamb's memory. The grave where they lie, in Edmonton churchyard, has occasionally been allowed to fall into a deplorable state. Private piety has twice restored the stone; and at the present moment the flowers are in the care of certain persons who are not likely to allow neglect again to reign; but one would like to think that the nation charged itself with some little office for this brother and sister.

As long ago as February, 1835, Bernard Barton's friend, W. B. Donne, writing to R. C. Trench, remarked of Lamb's death: "There's a great spirit gone, a prophet's mantle not soon to be caught nor lightly worn again. He wrought as effectually in restoring a large and braver spirit of feeling and of criticism in England as Wordsworth himself. He should have an epitaph over him like 'O rare Ben Jonson'; common epicedia will not suffice." Seventy-five years have passed since then and Lamb is still unhonoured publicly: no such epitaph has been inscribed over him. There are tablets on one or more of his houses, and that is all. His only real memorial is the joint tablet to Cowper, Keats, and himself, in Edmonton church (Cowper's place there being due to the mythical adventures of John Gilpin); and a stranger to our capital seeks in vain for any public expression of admiration or love for one who was not only so great a Londoner but perhaps the sweetest, sanest, and most human of English prose writers.

E. V. L.

*January, 1910.*

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
<p>I. JOHN AND ELIZABETH LAMB.—Charles Lamb's Birth—The Lambs and Lincolnshire—John Lamb—"Lovel"—Elizabeth Lamb—Samuel Salt—Francis Fielde . . . . .</p>	I
<p>II. AUNT HETTY.—Sarah Lamb and Her Youngest Nephew—Mr. Billet—"The Witch Aunt"—Sarah Lamb and Elizabeth Lamb—The Beggar and the Cake . . . . .</p>	II
<p>III. MRS. FIELD AND BLAKESWARE.—Lamb's Hertfordshire Kinsmen—Mackery End—Mary and Charles Lamb at the Farm—Miss Sarah Bruton—The Plumers—"The Young Mahometan"—Blakesware—Grandmother Field—Widford—"The Grandam"—The Twelve Cæsars—"Gone or Going" . . . . .</p>	20
<p>IV. FIRST SCHOOL AND FIRST THEATRE, 1780-1781.—Mrs. Reynolds—Hood's Recollections—Miss Pearson's Toyshop—William Bird's Academy—Captain Starkey—"Artaxerxes" and "Harlequin's Invasion"—Mary Lamb's First Play . . . . .</p>	38
<p>V. CHRIST'S HOSPITAL, 1782-1789.—John Lamb's Petition—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Holidays—Food—Matthew Field—James Boyer—Deputy Grecians—"The Rev. Charles Lamb"—Leigh Hunt—Lamb as a Schoolboy—Charles Valentine Le Grice—Sam Le Grice—Joseph Favell—Pantisocracy—Bob Allen—Thomas Fanshawe Middleton—The Coleridge Memorial . . . . .</p>	46
<p>VI JOSEPH PAICE AND ALICE W.—,1790-1794.—Thomas Coventry—Joseph Paice—Lamb at 27 Bread Street Hill—The South Sea House—The Odd Fishes' Influence—Samuel Salt's Death—7 Little Queen Street—The Early Spring of 1792 and Alice W.—The East India House—"Mr. Guy"—Lamb as a Playgoer . . . . .</p>	70

viii THE LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB

CHAPTER

PAGE

VII. LOVE, 1794-1796.—Coleridge in London—The Salutation in Newgate Street—Ann Simmons—The Sonnets—Mary Sumner—Charles Lamb, Bachelor—Robert Southey— <i>Falstaff's Letters</i> —Jem White . . . . .	79
VIII. THE BEGINNING OF THE CORRESPONDENCE, 1796.—Coleridge at Bristol—John Lamb's Accident—Priestley—William Wordsworth . . . . .	88
IX. THE TRAGEDY, 1796 ( <i>continued</i> ) . . . . .	93
X. 1796 ( <i>concluded</i> ).—Lines "To a Friend Who Declared His Intention of Writing no more Poetry"—Poems, by Charles Lamb, of the India House—Home Perplexities—Charles Lloyd—Hartley Coleridge Born—Aunt Hetty—Mary Lamb .	104
XI. 1797.—Charles Lloyd in London—Quakers—Death of Aunt Hetty—Coleridge and Lloyd's First Break—Mary Lamb Leaves the Asylum—Nether Stowey—Hazlitt's Description of Coleridge and Wordsworth—Dorothy Wordsworth—Lamb at Southey's—Poems on Mrs. Lamb—The Higginbottom Sonnets . . . . .	112
XII. 1798.—Mary Lamb Again III—"The Old Familiar Faces"—The Alienation of Coleridge—Theses Quædam Theologicæ—Exit Charles Lloyd—The Anti-Jacobins—Lamb Hits Back .	126
XIII. 1798 ( <i>concluded</i> ).— <i>Rosamund Gray</i> —Robert Lloyd—Correspondence with Southey—First Tidings of <i>John Woodvil</i> —Enter G. D. . . . .	139
XIV. GEORGE DYER . . . . .	144
XV. 1799.—Robert Lloyd at Pentonville—The Death of Mr. Lamb—Old Dorrell—Mary Lamb with Her Brother Again—"Old China"—Early Excursions—Book-Buying—Brother and Sister at the Play—Thomas Manning—Mock Latin—The Lambs' Finances . . . . .	168
XVI. 1800.—William Godwin—"Toad or Frog"—Coleridge at 36 Chapel Street—An Evening with Blue-stockings—Home in London Once More—Mary Lamb's First Poem—John Rickman— <i>John Woodvil</i> Again—Lamb and London—"Antonio"—John Philip Kemble—The Cambridge Itinerary . . .	178



# CONTENTS

ix

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVII. 1801.—Correspondence with Wordsworth—The Northern Castigation—The Move to 16 Mitre Court Buildings— <i>The Albion</i> —John Fenwick—Robert Fell—Captain Jackson—Randal Norris—George Burnett— <i>Specimens of English Prose Writers</i> —Lamb's "Ragged Intimados" . . . . .	196
XVIII. LAMB AS JOURNALIST, 1801-1804 . . . . .	214
XIX. 1802.—A Peer in Lamb's Rooms— <i>John Woodvil</i> Published—Its Reception by the Critics—The Lambs among the Lakes—Wordsworth and Lamb at Bartholomew Fair—Thomas Holcroft—Children's Books . . . . .	224
XX. 1803.—Captain Burney—"Sarah Battle"—Martin Burney—Colonel Phillips—William Ayrton—Whist-Table Jokes—Manning's Chinese Projects—Hester Savory—Coleridge at 16 Mitre Court Buildings—Smoking—Lamb and Dr. Parr—Mary Lamb's Gossip—Enter Sarah Stoddart—Mary Lamb's Good Sense—Talfourd's Testimony—Lamb's Difficulties in Reviewing . . . . .	233
XXI. 1804.—The Unhappy Coleridge—He Leaves for Malta—Mary Lamb's Poems—Robert Lloyd's Marriage—Enter William Hazlitt—Lamb and Hazlitt Contrasted—Thomas De Quincey—Lamb in His Office—Painter Acquaintances . . . . .	245
XXII. 1805.— <i>The King and Queen of Hearts</i> —The Death of John Wordsworth—Mary Lamb's Illness—Lamb's Eulogy of His Sister—Bridget Elia—First Praises of Pig—The "Farewell to Tobacco"—Correspondence with Hazlitt—George Dawe in His Studio . . . . .	256
XXIII. 1806.—Fenwick and Fell Again—Lamb at a Critical Age—Picture Galleries—"Pink" De Quincey and the Lambs—Manning Leaves for China—The <i>Tales from Shakespear</i> Begun—"Mr. H." Accepted—Basil Montagu—Hazlitt the Misogynist—Coleridge in Malta and Italy—"Mr. H." Played—and Damned—Hogsflesh in Real Life—Robert William Elliston—Enter Henry Crabb Robinson—Lamb and Coleridge at the Colliers' . . . . .	265

XXIV. 1807 AND 1808.—*Tales from Shakespear* Published—A Visit to the Clarksons—Hazlitt's Misogyny Overcome—The Hazlitt Suicide Joke—Plans for Hazlitt's Wedding—Braham's Singing—Mary Matilda Betham—Lamb's "Company Ways"—Coleridge's Lectures—Hazlitt's Wedding—*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived about the Time of Shakespear*—*Mrs. Leicester's School*—Collaboration with the Sheridans—Promise of the *Friend* . . . . . 282

XXV. 1809 AND 1810.—The Move to No. 4 Inner Temple Lane—Robert Lloyd in London—The Godwins at Home—*Poetry for Children*—Two Visits to Winterslow—Mary Lamb Ill Again—Teetotal Experiments—*The Reflector* . . . . . 294

XXVI. 1811.—Crabb Robinson's *Diary* Begins—Lamb on Wordsworth and Coleridge—Lamb's Scotchman—Death of George Burnett—Lamb's Puns—*Prince Dorus*—"Poor Coleridge" and "Poor Lamb"—Hazlitt's Son Born—Death of Robert Lloyd—Coleridge and Lamb on Shakespear—The Godwins . . . . . 305

XXVII. 1812.—Hazlitt's Christening Party—Benjamin Robert Haydon—Thomas Barnes—"The Triumph of the Whale"—The *Examiner* and the Prince Regent—James Kenney—Coleridge's Quarrel with Wordsworth—Lamb as a Landed Proprietor . . . . . 316

XXVIII. 1813.—Leigh Hunt in Prison—His Praises of Lamb—Lamb's "Favourite Child"—The "Confessions of a Drunkard"—Lamb and Strong Drink—Crabb Robinson's *Diary* Again . . . . . 326

XXIX. 1814.—A Lean Year—An Engagement with the *Champion*—An Evening with the Aikins—George Dawe becomes an R.A.—A Walk to Enfield—Lamb and Music—The Review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*—Lamb and Gifford—A Discovery at No. 4 Inner Temple Lane—Mary Lamb's Article on Women . . . . . 341

XXX. 1815-1816.—Enter Thomas Noon Talfourd—India House Bondage—The Frugal Wordsworth—Crabb Robinson's *Diary*—The Wordsworths in London—A Visit to Mackery End—Barron Field—The Cambridge Adventures—Mary Lamb Again Ill—Nonsense to Manning—A Happy 1816—Coleridge Settles at Highgate—A Month at Calne, in Wiltshire—Hazlitt's Article on Coleridge—Rustication at Dalston . . . . . 350

# CONTENTS

xi

CHAPTER

PAGE

- XXXI. 1817.—Hazlitt and Wordsworth—A Visit to Brighton—Lamb's Thursday Evenings—Talfourd's Description—Procter's Description—Lamb's Way with His Guests—First Meeting with Procter—Thomas Love Peacock—Hazlitt's Account of a Thursday Evening—"Persons One would Wish to Have Seen"—Hazlitt's Quarrel with Lamb—Manning's Return—The Move to Great Russell Street—Coleridge's Plans—The Dinner at Haydon's—Lamb and Keats—Lamb and Shelley—Vincent Novello's Parties—A Dinner Party . . . . . 371
- XXXII. 1818.—Coleridge's Lectures—The Plague of Friends—Washington Allston—Lamb's *Works*—His Sonnet against Gifford—Visit to Birmingham—Mary Lamb Ill Again—Philarete Chasles' Description of Lamb—Procter's Description . . . . . 401
- XXXIII. 1819.—Crabb Robinson's *Diary*—Charles Lloyd in London—Tommy Bye's Excesses—Lamb's Admiration of Miss Kelly—His Proposal and Her Answer—"The Waggoner"—Lamb at Cambridge—William Wordsworth, junior, at 18 Great Russell Street—Morgan in Distress . . . . . 410
- XXXIV. 1820.—A very Short Chapter—Charles Aders—John Thelwall and *The Champion*—Lamb's Political Epigrams—The Regent and Canning—James Sheridan Knowles—The Wordsworths in London—The Lambs at Cambridge Again—Emma Isola—Mary Lamb Again Ill—Miss Kelly—Thomas Allsop . . . . . 425
- XXXV. THE *LONDON MAGAZINE* AND *ELIA*, 1820-1825.—The *London Magazine*—John Scott—His Death—*Blackwood* and Lamb—"Christopher North"—John Taylor—New Friends—H. F. Cary—Thomas Griffiths Wainewright—John Clare—The *London's* Decay—The Birth of *Elia*—Lamb's Place in Literature—Lamb and Hazlitt as Influences—The Evolution of an Essay—Landor's Praise of *Elia*—Mr. Swinburne's Eulogy—Walter Pater on Lamb . . . . . 434
- XXXVI. CHARLES LAMB IN *ELIA* . . . . . 451
- XXXVII. 1821.—Lamb's Golden Year—Sarah Burney's Wedding—An Evening with Charles Mathews—At Margate with the Novellos—Lamb and Mrs. Barbauld—De Quincey at Great Russell Street—Lamb Asleep—"Diddle, Diddle, Dumpkins"—In Praise of Hazlitt—Julius Hare and Lamb . . . . . 460



XXXVIII. JOHN LAMB . . . . .	470
XXXIX. 1822.—Lamb and the Man of the World—Coleridge's Invisible Genius—Coleridge and the Pig—India House Shackles—The <i>London Magazine</i> Becomes Irsome—The Lambs in France—An Evening with Talma—Mary Lamb's Illness—Crabb Robinson in Paris—Thomas Hood—Bernard Barton—Lamb's Sonnet on Work—Barton's Sonnet to Elia—Godwin in Difficulties—Lamb and Sir Walter Scott—Godwin's Last Days . . . . .	484
XL. 1823.—Contemporary Opinion of Lamb—A Letter of Thanks for a Pig—Byron's "Vision of Judgment"—Good Sense to Barton—Sara Coleridge at Highgate—Lamb and the Pudding—Monkhouse's Famous Dinners—Lamb and Tom Moore—Mary Lamb's Handwriting—Enter John Bates Dibdin—The Lambs at Hastings—A Church for the Pocket—Lamb and the Bathing Men—The "Letter to Southey"—Christopher North's Chaff—Southey's Fine Reply—The Reconciliation—The Move to Colebrooke Cottage—A Last Glimpse of the Covent Garden Rooms—George Daniel's Recollections of Lamb—Robert Bloomfield—Lamb Makes His Will—George Dyer's Immersion—Lamb at the Mansion House . . . . .	496
XLI. 1824.—A Lethargy—Hazlitt's <i>Select British Poets</i> —Manning Rapt—Peter George Patmore—A Parody of Lamb—Lamb's Clothes—William Blake—Byron's Death—Munden's Farewell—Lamb and Mrs. Barbauld Again—Some "Maddish Spirits"—An Evening with Coleridge—Edward Irving—Procter's Marriage—Mary Russell Mitford—A Warning to Barton—"Saint Charles" . . . . .	520
XLII. THE RELEASE, 1825.—Emancipation a Possibility—Harrison Ainsworth— <i>The Spirit of the Age</i> —Hazlitt on Lamb Again—Emancipation Realised—"The Superannuated Man"—Lamb at the East India House—Fellow Clerks—John Chambers' Stories—In the Stocks at Barnet—Ogilvie's Stories—The Burdens of Leisure . . . . .	535
XLIII. AFTER THE RELEASE, 1825 ( <i>continued</i> ).—Lamb Ill—Enter William Hone—The Two Snuff-boxes—Barry Cornwall's Rhyming Epistle—Last Contribution to the <i>London Magazine</i> —An Evening with Lamb and Coleridge . . . . .	549

# CONTENTS

xiii

CHAPTER	PAGE
<p>XLIV. 1826.—Henry Meyer's Portrait of Lamb—Brook Pulham's Caricature—Enter Edward Moxon—A Party at Leigh Hunt's—Dibdin's Sunday at Hastings—A Task at the British Museum—The Rev. John Mitford at Colebrooke Cottage—"Dash" . . . . .</p>	561
<p>XLV. 1827.—The Death of Randal Norris—Mrs. Coe's Reminiscences—Lamb Among Children—Lamb's Good Things—Angling—"On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born"—Mary Lamb by Thomas Hood—<i>The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies</i>—A Few Jokes—An Evening at the Hoods—Nonsense to Patmore—Emma Isola's Latinity—The Clarkson Memorial—"In My Own Album"—The Removal to Enfield—Mary Lamb Ill Again—Enter Thomas Westwood—Lamb and Walton—Robinson at Enfield . . . . .</p>	571
<p>XLVI. 1828.—A Quiet Year—The Cowden Clarkes at Enfield—Their Recollections of Lamb and his Sister—Mary Lamb's Appearance—An American Edition of <i>Elia</i> . . . . .</p>	595
<p>XLVII. 1829.—A Revival of Good Spirits—Emma Isola's Album—Lamb's Choice of Old Poetry—"The Gypsy's Malison"—A Joke upon Crabb Robinson—Crabb Robinson at Enfield—Becky the Tyrant—Mary Lamb's Illness—Lamb Alone—"Leisure" and a Recantation—Housekeeping Given Up—The Westwoods—A Godson—A Short Way with Bankrupts—Lamb in the Political Arena . . . . .</p>	604
<p>XLVIII. 1830-1831.—London Calling—Emma Isola's Illness—Visit to Farnham—Genial Excesses and Genial Excuses—A Paper for Hone—<i>Album Verses</i> Published—Jerdan's Attack—Southey's Rally—Other Hostile Critics—A London Experiment—"Free Thoughts on Some Eminent Composers"—The Death of Hazlitt—Mary Lamb Ill Again—George Dyer's Blindness—Wordsworth's Sugar—Coleridge's Pension—<i>The Englishman's Magazine</i>—Lamb and Unitarianism—Robinson at Enfield—Thomas Carlyle at Enfield—Truth for Truth's Sake—Lamb and Scotchmen . . . . .</p>	619
<p>XLIX. 1832-1833.—A Bad Beginning to 1832—Recovery—A Bad Pun—Lamb at Crabb Robinson's—"Christopher North" at Enfield—Walter Savage Landor at Enfield—"Rose Aylmer"—Death of Mrs. Reynolds—<i>The Reflector</i>—Mistaken for a Murderer—<i>The Last Essays of Elia</i>—Moxon's Sonnets—And Recollections of Lamb—His Engagement to Emma Isola—Enfield Exchanged for Edmonton—The Lambs at Edmonton—Emma Isola's Watch—The Wedding—"Thoughts on Presents of Game"—A Calamity of Authorship—A Statuette of Lamb(?) . . . . .</p>	642

## CHAPTER

## PAGE

L. 1834.—Mary Lamb and Her Brother—Her "Rambling Chat"— The Martins in Trouble—Lamb and Samuel Warren— N. P. Willis and the Lambs—The Death of Coleridge— The Testimony of the Two Friends—The Beginning of the End—Mr. Fuller Russell's Reminiscences of Edmonton —Thomas Westwood Again—Bulwer on Lamb—The Accident—Lamb's Death—Wordsworth's Epitaph—Cary's Epitaph—Lamb and Cowper . . . . .	660
LI. MARY LAMB'S LAST DAYS, 1835-1847 . . . . .	681
INDEX . . . . .	689



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Charles and Mary Lamb (from the painting by F. S. Cary in the National Portrait Gallery). (Photogravure) . . . . .	Frontispiece
John Lamb . . . . .	4
Saul Consulting a Witch at Endor (from Stackhouse's <i>History of the Bible</i> ) . . . . .	16
Blakesware about 1795 . . . . .	30
James Boyer . . . . .	54
Joseph Paice (from an engraving after the original painting by Abbot. By permission of Miss R. V. Malleson) . . . . .	72
Coleridge in 1798 . . . . .	118
Charles Lamb, aged 23 . . . . .	126
George Dyer . . . . .	164
Thomas Manning . . . . .	176
Hester Savory . . . . .	238
William Hazlitt . . . . .	250
Charles Lamb in his 30th year . . . . .	256
Facsimile Letter to Wordsworth . . . . .	272
Charles Lamb (from the drawing by G. J. Joseph in 1819) . . . . .	410
Fanny Kelly . . . . .	414
Elia (from the original sketch by Daniel Maclise in the South Kensington Museum). . . . .	448
Bernard Barton (from the painting by Samuel Laurence) . . . . .	494
Colebrooke Cottage . . . . .	516
Charles Lamb in 1825 or 1826. By Thomas Wageman . . . . .	536
Elia. Caricature by Brook Pulham . . . . .	544
Charles Lamb, aged 51. By Henry Meyer . . . . .	562
Mrs. Gilpin (Mary Lamb) . . . . .	578
Chase Side, Enfield . . . . .	588
Map of the Lamb Country . . . . .	600
Portrait of Thomas Westwood. By Charles Lamb . . . . .	616
Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt and Thornton Hunt, in Hunt's Study . . . . .	632
Walden Cottage, Edmonton . . . . .	654
A Statuette of Charles Lamb or the first Duke of Sutherland . . . . .	658
S. T. Coleridge in Old Age. By Daniel Maclise . . . . .	668



# THE LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB

## CHAPTER I

### JOHN AND ELIZABETH LAMB

Charles Lamb's Birth—The Lambs and Lincolnshire—John Lamb—"Love!"—  
Elizabeth Lamb—Samuel Salt—Francis Fielde.

**I**N 1775, when Charles Lamb was born, Goldsmith had been dead a year, Gray and Smollett four years, Chatterton five, Sterne seven, Hogarth eleven, Richardson fourteen, Fielding twenty, Swift thirty and Pope thirty-one. In the same year Dr. Johnson was sixty-six, Garrick fifty-nine, Horace Walpole fifty-eight, Reynolds fifty-two, Burke forty-five, Sheridan twenty-four, Crabbe twenty-one, William Blake eighteen, Burns sixteen, Bowles and Cobbett thirteen, Wordsworth five, Sir Walter Scott four, Coleridge three and Southey one. Landor came into the world eleven days before Lamb, Jane Austen at the end of the same year.

The birthplace of the most lovable figure in English literature was the stronghold of English law and lawyers—the Temple. No. 2 Crown Office Row, where Charles Lamb was born on February 10th, 1775, still occupies its original position, although the row was rebuilt in 1863-64. The iron gates, dated 1730, leading to the garden opposite, are the same through which the little curious thoughtful boy must often have peered or wandered.

The Lamb family came from Lincolnshire; but we know practically nothing more of their history than is given in the sonnet on their gentle name:—

Perchance some shepherd on Lincolnian plains,  
In manners guileless as his own sweet flocks,  
Received thee first amid the merry mocks  
And arch allusions of his fellow swains.  
Perchance from Salem's holier fields return'd,

With glory gotten on the heads abhorr'd  
 Of faithless Saracens, some martial lord  
 Took HIS meek title, in whose zeal he burn'd.  
 Whate'er the fount whence thy beginnings came,  
 No deed of mine shall shame thee, gentle name.

In a letter to Manning in 1810, in a jesting list of titles of honour which he might choose, Lamb mentions "Baron Lamb of Stamford," adding, "Where my family came from. I have chosen that if ever I should have my choice." Although the whole passage is a joke, I think that the reference to Stamford is serious. I have not, however, been able to trace the family in or about Stamford.

I think we have a glimpse of the Lambs' grandparents in the story of Susan Yates which Charles wrote for *Mrs. Leicester's School*: "I was born [says the little girl] and brought up, in a house in which my parents had all their lives resided, which stood in the midst of that lonely tract of land called the Lincolnshire fens. Few families besides our own lived near the spot, both because it was reckoned an unwholesome air, and because its distance from any town or market made it an inconvenient situation. My father was in no very affluent circumstances, and it was a sad necessity which he was put to, of having to go many miles to fetch any thing he wanted from the nearest village, which was full seven miles distant, through a sad miry way that at all times made it heavy walking, and after rain was almost impassable. But he had no horse or carriage of his own.

"The church which belonged to the parish in which our house was situated, stood in this village; and its distance being, as I said before, seven miles from our house, made it quite an impossible thing for my mother or me to think of going to it. Sometimes indeed, on a fine dry Sunday, my father would rise early, and take a walk to the village, just to see how *goodness thrived*, as he used to say, but he would generally return tired, and the worse for his walk. It is scarcely possible to explain to any one who has not lived in the fens, what difficult and dangerous walking it is. A mile is as good as four, I have heard my father say, in those parts." These are, I think, just such recollections as John Lamb might have treasured from his early Lincolnshire days and have told his children: that is to say, for Susan's father we may perhaps read Charles Lamb's grandfather. His



joke concerning Sunday mornings is quite in the Lamb manner. The Church in the story is called St. Mary's, and there is a St. Mary's Church at Stamford.

One other glimpse of Lincolnshire's connection with the Lambs will be found in the *Elia* essay "Poor Relations," where Lamb's father and John Billet (as he styles an unidentifiable kinsman from the Mint) recall old fights between the Upper and Lower boys of Lincoln, whither John Lamb may have moved quite young, from Stamford.<sup>1</sup>

I fancy also that if we could know more we should find that the dark hints as to the calamity overshadowing the Clare family, in Chapter VII. of *Rosamund Gray*, were based upon a misfortune suffered by John Lamb or his father. But the time has gone by ever to unravel those sombre pages, with their almost painful sense of reality between the lines and beneath the initials and blanks.

At the time of Charles Lamb's birth the family consisted of John Lamb the father, Elizabeth Lamb the mother, Aunt "Hetty" (by baptism Sarah), John Lamb's sister, John Lamb the younger, who was born on 5th June in 1763, and Mary Anne Lamb, whom we know as Mary Lamb, born on 3rd December in 1764. There had been four other children, but all had died young. I subjoin their names from the Temple register:—

- (1) ELIZABETH, born 9th January, baptised 30th January, 1762.
- (2) JOHN, born 5th June, baptised 26th June, by the Rev. Mr. Dobey, 1763.
- (3) MARY ANNE, born 3rd December, baptised 30th December, by the Rev. Mr. Humphreys, 1764.
- (4) SAMUEL (the date of whose birth is unrecorded), baptised 13th December, 1765.
- (5) ELIZABETH, born 30th August, baptised 3rd September, 1768.

<sup>1</sup> A number of Lambs still live in Lincolnshire, and the grave of a John and Sarah Lamb who died respectively in 1779 and 1759 is to be seen at St. Michael's on-the-Mount, but I have found it impossible to connect either living or dead with the family in the Temple. The John Lamb above was of St. Swithin's Parish, Lincoln, and his will shows him to have married again. All his property was left to his widow Catherine, unless she married again, when it was to pass to two legatees in trust for one Walter Baker. Five pounds were bequeathed to a sister Mary. Among the witnesses of the will were J. Reynolds and Richard Reynolds. The names John and Sarah, which were the names of Charles Lamb's father and aunt, the name Mary, which was the name of his sister, and the name Reynolds, which, as we shall see, was the married name of his school-mistress, form the only evidence that these Lambs had any connection with our Lambs. But it is too slight in itself, and is practically destroyed by the worldly prosperity of the testator and the terms of his will, in which no person of the name of Lamb is mentioned.

(6) EDWARD, born 3rd September, baptised 21st September, 1770.

(7) CHARLES, born 10th February, 1775, baptised 10th March following by the Rev. Mr. Jeffs.

It would be the second little Elizabeth of whom Mary Lamb wrote in a letter to Mrs. Vincent Novello, on the death of a little daughter, in 1820: "Together with the recollection of your dear baby, the image of a little sister I once had comes as fresh into my mind as if I had seen her lately. A little cap, with white satin ribbon, grown yellow with long keeping, and a lock of light hair, were the only relics left of her. The sight of them always brought her pretty fair face to my view that to this day I seem to have a perfect recollection of her features."

John Lamb the father, in 1775, when his youngest child was born, was a little brisk man of about fifty. In the following years, as his son says in verses written in 1798,

a merrier man,  
A man more apt to frame matter for mirth,  
Mad jokes, and antics for a Christmas eve,  
Making life social, and the laggard time  
To move on nimble, never yet did cheer  
The little circle of domestic friends.

By profession John Lamb was a scrivener, but his principal employment for many years, until Charles was seventeen, was that of servant and assistant to Samuel Salt, a Bencher of the Inner Temple, and occupant of two sets of chambers (one for the Lambs) at 2 Crown Office Row. Of him, more a little later; but this brings us to Lamb's fullest description of his father, in the *Elia* essay on the Old Benchers, in its original form in the *London Magazine*. Lovel, says Lamb—Lovel being the name which concealed his father's identity—Lovel took absolute charge of Samuel Salt. "He was at once his clerk, his good servant, his dresser, his friend, his 'flapper,' his guide, stop-watch, auditor, treasurer." Salt "did nothing without consulting Lovel, or failed in any thing without expecting and fearing his admonishing. He put himself almost too much in his hands, had they not been the purest in the world. He resigned his title almost to respect as a master, if L. could ever have forgotten for a moment that he was a servant.

"I knew this Lovel. He was a man of an incorrigible and losing honesty. A good fellow withal, and 'would strike.' In



JOHN LAMB

THE FATHER OF CHARLES LAMB





the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents. He once wrested a sword out of the hand of a man of quality that had drawn upon him ; and pommelled him severely with the hilt of it. The swordsman had offered insult to a female—an occasion upon which no odds against him could have prevented the interference of Lovel. He would stand next day bare-headed to the same person, modestly to excuse his interference—for L. never forgot rank, where something better was not concerned. He pleaded the cause of a delinquent in the Treasury of the Temple so effectually with S. the then treasurer—that the man was allowed to keep his place. L. had the offer to succeed him. It had been a lucrative promotion. But L. chose to forego the advantage, because the man had a wife and family.

“L. was the liveliest little fellow breathing, had a face as gay as Garrick’s, whom he was said greatly to resemble (I have a portrait of him which confirms it), possessed a fine turn for humorous poetry—next to Swift and Prior—moulded heads in clay or plaster of Paris to admiration, by the dint of natural genius merely ; turned cribbage boards, and such small cabinet toys, to perfection ; took a hand at quadrille or bowls with equal facility ; made punch better than any man of his degree in England ; had the merriest quips and conceits, and was altogether as brimful of rogueries and inventions as you could desire. He was a brother of the angle, moreover, and just such a free, hearty, honest companion as Mr. Izaak Walton would have chosen to go a-fishing with.”—Such was John Lamb when his youngest son was a child and prosperity shone.

Among the books in Charles Lamb’s library (now in America) are a copy of *Hudibras* and an odd volume of *The Guardian*, both of which had belonged to his father and contain his name. John Lamb left the world, moreover, a book of his own writing—*Poetical Pieces on Several Occasions*—which I have reprinted as an appendix to this work ; but the quaint little collection, although valuable for what it tells us of its author’s mind and career, hardly justifies the critical verdict of a too partial son. Lamb, by the way, returned to the Prior comparison a few years after the *Elia* essay. In a letter in verse to John Bates Dibdin, in 1826, he begins :—

Because you boast poetic Grandsire,  
 And rhyming kin, both Uncle and Sire,  
 Dost think that none but *their* Descendings  
 Can tickle folks with double endings?  
 I had a Dad, that would for half a bet  
 Have put down thine thro' half the Alphabet.  
 Thou, who would be Dan Prior the second,  
 For Dan Posterior must be reckon'd.

The *Poetical Pieces* add to our knowledge of John Lamb the fact that he lived for a while at Bath, was once a footman, and was later an active member of a Friendly Society for the benefit of its members' widows—a company of fifty good fellows, probably connected more or less with the law, who met at the Devil Tavern to arrange their munificences. Among John Lamb's verses are rhymed addresses written for various annual meetings of this society. It is interesting to note, on the evidence of one of his pieces, that he called his dog after Matt. Prior.

Charles Lamb's mother, Elizabeth Lamb, had been a Field, daughter of a Hertfordshire yeoman. Her mother, Mary Field (born Bruton), was living, at the time of Lamb's birth, at Blakesware, near Ware, in Hertfordshire, as housekeeper and sole custodian of an old mansion belonging to the Plumers. There, as we shall see, her grandchildren often visited her. Lamb's mother was tall and stately; it was said that she might have been a sister of Mrs. Siddons. John Lamb the younger, whom his brother describes as portly, must have inherited from the maternal side his full stature, just as Charles "favoured" his father. Of Mrs. Lamb's character we know little, but I imagine her to have been calm and dignified, with much natural refinement, yet lacking in imaginative sympathy. In one of his letters Lamb told Coleridge that his mother never rightly understood Mary, and that John was her favourite. We should no doubt have had from her son's pen as full a portrait as of his father and his brother and sister but for tragic reasons which too soon must be narrated. As it happened, she could not take her right place in his more personal essays. After the year 1798 he referred to her in print only I think twice, and then more as an abstraction than a reality. But we have the beautiful references to her in *Blank Verse*, 1798:—

Oh my dear mother, oh thou dear dead saint !  
 Where's now that placid face, where oft hath sat  
 A mother's smile, to think her son should thrive  
 In this bad world, when she was dead and gone ;  
 And where a tear hath sat (take shame, O son !)  
 When that same child has prov'd himself unkind.

and again :—

Thou should'st have longer liv'd, and to the grave  
 Have peacefully gone down in full old age !  
 Thy children would have tended thy gray hairs.  
 We might have sat, as we have often done,  
 By our fireside, and talk'd whole nights away,  
 Old times, old friends, and old events recalling ;  
 With many a circumstance, of trivial note,  
 To memory dear, and of importance grown.  
 How shall we tell them in a stranger's ear ?  
 A wayward son oft-times was I to thee ;  
 And yet, in all our little bickerings,  
 Domestic jars, there was, I know not what,  
 Of tender feeling, that were ill exchange'd  
 For this world's chilling friendships, and their smiles  
 Familiar, whom the heart calls strangers still.

And here let us see what manner of man was Samuel Salt, friend and employer of John and Elizabeth Lamb ; to whom Charles Lamb eventually owed so much, and to whom indirectly we all therefore owe so much. In the essay on the Old Benchers he stands forth in his unruffled temper and pensive gentility. "S. had the reputation of being a very clever man, and of excellent discernment in the chamber practice of the law. I suspect his knowledge did not amount to much. When a case of difficult disposition of money, testamentary or otherwise, came before him, he ordinarily handed it over with a few instructions to his man Lovel, who was a quick little fellow, and would despatch it out of hand by the light of natural understanding, of which he had an uncommon share. It was incredible what repute for talents S. enjoyed by the mere trick of gravity. He was a shy man ; a child might pose him in a minute—indolent and procrastinating to the last degree. Yet men would give him credit for vast application in spite of himself. He was not to be trusted with himself with impunity. He never dressed for a dinner party but he forgot his sword—they wore swords then—or some other necessary part of his equipage. Lovel had his eye upon him on all these occasions, and ordinarily gave him his cue. If there



was any thing which he could speak unseasonably, he was sure to do it.—He was to dine at a relative's of the unfortunate Miss Blandy on the day of her execution ;—and L. who had a wary foresight of his probable hallucinations, before he set out, schooled him with great anxiety not in any possible manner to allude to her story that day. S. promised faithfully to observe the injunction. He had not been seated in the parlour, where the company was expecting the dinner summons, four minutes, when, a pause in the conversation ensuing, he got up, looked out of window, and pulling down his ruffles—an ordinary motion with him—observed, ‘it was a gloomy day,’ and added, ‘Miss Blandy must be hanged by this time, I suppose.’<sup>1</sup>

“Instances of this sort were perpetual. Yet S. was thought by some of the greatest men of his time a fit person to be consulted, not alone in matters pertaining to the law, but in the ordinary niceties and embarrassments of conduct—from force of manner entirely. He never laughed. He had the same good fortune among the female world,—was a known toast with the ladies, and one or two are said to have died for love of him—I suppose, because he never trifled or talked gallantry with them, or paid them, indeed, hardly common attentions. He had a fine face and person. . . .”

Samuel Salt had married young, lost his wife in childbed, and had never recovered from the shock of grief. He sat in Parliament for some years, and was a Governor of thirty hospitals, and Director of the South Sea Company and of the East India Company. It was through his influence that John Lamb entered the South-Sea House, and Charles Lamb Christ's Hospital and the India House. Samuel Salt performed a further service more far-reaching in character when he gave Charles Lamb and his sister the run of his library. “She was tumbled early,” Charles says of Mary (in the *Elia* essay “Mackery End”), “by accident or design, into a spacious closet of good old English reading, without much selection or prohibition.” The spacious closet was Samuel Salt's, and later, we may rest assured, her little brother was tumbled there too. Samuel Salt's library may confidently be called the place of Lamb the book-lover's “kindly engendure.” What were the boy's favourite

<sup>1</sup> Lamb adapted this incident for use in “Mr. H.”



books we do not know. But in 1796, when recommending *The Compleat Angler* to Coleridge's attention, he says, "it was the delight of my childhood," and in 1828 he describes to Bernard Barton with rapture an edition of the *Pilgrim's Progress* which he knew when a child.

Charles Lamb, as we have seen, was christened by Mr. Jeffs on March 10, 1775. In the essay "My First Play" he has described one of his godfathers. The other was a gunsmith named Henshaw, of whom we know nothing except that he had a dissolute son; but Francis Fielde we seem to know intimately. Fielde was an oilman, of Holborn, at the corner of Featherstone Buildings, and it is to the circumstance that he gave the Lambs their tickets for Drury Lane on the night of the famous performance of "Artaxerxes," in 1780, that he owes his place in an essay on the drama.

He was, says his godson, "a tall grave person, lofty in speech, and had pretensions above his rank. He associated in those days with John Palmer, the comedian, whose gait and bearing he seemed to copy; if John (which is quite as likely) did not rather borrow somewhat of his manner from my godfather. He was also known to, and visited by, Sheridan. It was to his house in Holborn that young Brinsley brought his first wife on her elopement with him from a boarding-school at Bath—the beautiful Maria Linley. My parents were present (over a quadrille table) when he arrived in the evening with his harmonious charge.—From either of these connexions it may be inferred that my godfather could command an order for the then Drury-lane theatre at pleasure—and, indeed, a pretty liberal issue of those cheap billets, in Brinsley's easy autograph, I have heard him say, was the sole remuneration which he had received for many years' nightly illumination of the orchestra and various avenues of that theatre—and he was content it should be so. The honour of Sheridan's familiarity—or supposed familiarity—was better to my godfather than money.

"F. was the most gentlemanly of oilmen; grandiloquent, yet courteous. His delivery of the commonest matters of fact was Ciceronian. He had two Latin words almost constantly in his mouth (how odd sounds Latin from an oilman's lips!), which my better knowledge since has enabled me to correct. In strict pronunciation they should have been sounded *vice*

*versa*—but in those young years they impressed me with more awe than they would now do, read aright from Seneca or Varro—in his own peculiar pronunciation, monosyllabically elaborated, or Anglicized, into something like *verse verse*. By an imposing manner, and the help of these distorted syllables, he climbed (but that was little) to the highest parochial honours which St. Andrew's has to bestow."

To disentangle fact from fiction, the meat from the sauce, in these paragraphs, is not easy. I have searched in vain in the records of Sheridan for any mention of Fielde's name (it is generally believed that young Brinsley's bride was befriended in London by Mr. Ewart); while Fielde eludes pursuit also in the records of the parish of St. Andrew's. Yet both his acquaintance with Sheridan and his parochial importance have an air of truth.

Francis Fielde, who may have been of the same family as Lamb's mother, despite his redundant "e," was certainly a Holborn oilman, as the directories prove. Latterly he became rich and moved to New Cavendish Street, where he died in 1809. We shall come to him again in connection with a little piece of property which passed to his godson in 1812. To this Lamb alludes later in the same essay; and we know it to have been a genuine inheritance—although it reached the essayist indirectly.

## CHAPTER II

## AUNT HETTY

Sarah Lamb and her Youngest Nephew—Mr. Billet—"The Witch Aunt"—  
Sarah Lamb and Elizabeth Lamb—The Beggar and the Cake.

WE may suppose that the principal companion of the little boy as he grew out of infancy into childhood, and out of childhood into boyhood, was his sister Mary. Since she was in her eleventh year when he was born, she would be, when he was five, quite of an age to take charge of him. John Lamb was sufficiently occupied in attending to Mr. Salt; Mrs. Lamb also probably had enough to do, for I imagine that in addition to her own household she had Mr. Salt's table to consider; while John Lamb the younger, who when his small brother was five was probably just beginning life in an office, had, we may safely assume, no particular taste for playing with any one so immature. Mary would thus be Charles's most intimate companion; and in the *Poetry for Children*, which the two were to write thirty years later, we may, I think, find many reflections of their companionship.

But there was still another member of the family whose influence on the little boy's mind was very considerable, especially, I think, as the child grew older and was ready for something riper than at that time Mary Lamb was in a position to offer. Sarah Lamb, John Lamb's unmarried sister, known as Aunt Hetty, seems to have been in a peculiarly intimate way the friend of her younger nephew. The several glimpses of her in the essays and letters agree in making her loving, and sensitive, and misunderstood; also a little forbidding and difficult, as we say. But her kindness to Charles was unailing. "I had an aunt," he wrote in "My Relations," "a dear and good one. She was one whom single blessedness had soured to the world. She often used to say, that I was the



only thing in it which she loved; and, when she thought I was quitting it, she grieved over me with mother's tears. A partiality quite so exclusive my reason cannot altogether approve. She was from morning till night poring over good books, and devotional exercises. Her favourite volumes were Thomas à Kempis, in Stanhope's translation; and a Roman Catholic Prayer Book, with the *matins* and *complines* regularly set down,—terms which I was at that time too young to understand. She persisted in reading them, although admonished daily concerning their Papistical tendency; and went to church every Sabbath, as a good Protestant should do. These were the only books she studied; though, I think, at one period of her life, she told me, she had read with great satisfaction the *Adventures of an Unfortunate Young Nobleman*.

“Finding the door of the chapel in Essex-street open one day—it was in the infancy of that heresy—she went in, liked the sermon, and the manner of worship, and frequented it at intervals for some time after. She came not for doctrinal points, and never missed them. With some little asperities in her constitution, which I have above hinted at, she was a steadfast, friendly being, and a fine *old Christian*. She was a woman of strong sense, and a shrewd mind—extraordinary at a *repartee*; one of the few occasions of her breaking silence—else she did not much value wit. The only secular employment I remember to have seen her engaged in, was the splitting of French beans, and dropping them into a China basin of fair water. The odour of those tender vegetables to this day comes back upon my sense, redolent of soothing recollections. Certainly it is the most delicate of culinary operations.”

No example of Aunt Hetty's power of repartee is given by her nephew, who shared her gift, but he records one of her unfortunate slips of the tongue. The narrative is indispensable, both for its humour and for the light which it sheds not only upon Aunt Hetty's manner, but also upon the household in the Temple and the company to which the little grave boy was accustomed. The passage is in “*Poor Relations*”: “At my father's table (no very splendid one) was to be found, every Saturday, the mysterious figure of an aged gentleman, clothed in neat black, of a sad yet comely appearance. His deportment was of the essence of gravity; his words few or none; and I was not to



make a noise in his presence. I had little inclination to have done so—for my cue was to admire in silence. A particular elbow chair was appropriated to him, which was in no case to be violated. A peculiar sort of sweet pudding, which appeared on no other occasion, distinguished the days of his coming. I used to think him a prodigiously rich man. All I could make out of him was, that he and my father had been school-fellows a world ago at Lincoln, and that he came from the Mint. The Mint I knew to be a place where all the money was coined—and I thought he was the owner of all that money. Awful ideas of the Tower twined themselves about his presence. He seemed above human infirmities and passions. A sort of melancholy grandeur invested him. From some inexplicable doom I fancied him obliged to go about in an eternal suit of mourning; a captive—a stately being, let out of the Tower on Saturdays.

“Often have I wondered at the temerity of my father, who, in spite of an habitual general respect which we all in common manifested towards him, would venture now and then to stand up against him in some argument, touching their youthful days. The houses of the ancient city of Lincoln are divided (as most of my readers know) between the dwellers on the hill, and in the valley. This marked distinction formed an obvious division between the boys who lived above (however brought together in a common school) and the boys whose paternal residence was on the plain; a sufficient cause of hostility in the code of these young Grotiuses. My father had been a leading Mountaineer; and would still maintain the general superiority, in skill and hardihood, of the *Above Boys* (his own faction) over the *Below Boys* (so were they called), of which party his contemporary had been a chieftain. Many and hot were the skirmishes on this topic—the only one upon which the old gentleman was ever brought out—and bad blood bred; even sometimes almost to the recommencement (so I expected) of actual hostilities. But my father, who scorned to insist upon advantages, generally contrived to turn the conversation upon some adroit by-commendation of the old Minster; in the general preference of which, before all other cathedrals in the island, the dweller on the hill, and the plain-born, could meet on a conciliating level, and lay down their less important differences.

“Once only I saw the old gentleman really ruffled, and I remembered with anguish the thought that came over me: ‘Perhaps he will never come here again.’ He had been pressed to take another plate of the viand, which I have already mentioned as the indispensable concomitant of his visits. He had refused, with a resistance amounting to rigour—when my aunt, an old Lincolnian, but who had something of this, in common with my cousin Bridget, that she would sometimes press civility out of season—uttered the following memorable application—‘Do take another slice, Mr. Billet, for you do not get pudding every day.’ The old gentleman said nothing at the time—but he took occasion in the course of the evening, when some argument had intervened between them, to utter with an emphasis which chilled the company, and which chills me now as I write it—‘Woman, you are superannuated.’ John Billet did not survive long, after the digesting of this affront; but he survived long enough to assure me that peace was actually restored! and, if I remember aright, another pudding was discreetly substituted in the place of that which had occasioned the offence.”

In the story of Maria Howe, which Charles Lamb contributed to *Mrs. Leicester's School*, I think we have beyond question a genuine experience of his own as a child, as well as, under the style “The Witch Aunt,” a further description of Sarah Lamb. “My aunt,” wrote Lamb (as Maria Howe) in 1808, when he was thirty-three, “my aunt was my father's sister. She had never been married. My father was a good deal older than my mother, and my aunt was ten years older than my father. As I was often left at home with her, and as my serious disposition so well agreed with hers, an intimacy grew up between the old lady and me, and she would often say, that she only loved one person in the world, and that was me. Not that she and my parents were on very bad terms; but the old lady did not feel herself respected enough. The attention and fondness which she shewed to me, conscious as I was that I was almost the only being she felt any thing like fondness to, made me love her, as it was natural; indeed I am ashamed to say that I fear I almost loved her better than both my parents put together. But there was an oddness, a silence about my aunt, which was never interrupted but by her occasional expressions of love to me, that made me stand in fear of her. An odd look from under her spectacles would sometimes

scare me away, when I had been peering up in her face to make her kiss me. Then she had a way of muttering to herself, which, though it was good words and religious words that she was mumbling, somehow I did not like. My weak spirits, and the fears I was subject to, always made me afraid of any personal singularity or oddness in any one. . . .

“But I must return to my studies, and tell you what books I found in the closet, and what reading I chiefly admired. There was a great Book of Martyrs in which I used to read, or rather I used to spell out meanings; for I was too ignorant to make out many words; but there it was written all about those good men who chose to be burnt alive, rather than forsake their religion, and become naughty papists. Some words I could make out, some I could not; but I made out enough to fill my little head with vanity, and I used to think I was so courageous I could be burnt too, and I would put my hands upon the flames which were pictured in the pretty pictures which the book had, and feel them. . . .

“Then there was a book not so big, but it had pictures in, it was called Culpepper’s Herbal; it was full of pictures of plants and herbs, but I did not much care for that. Then there was Salmon’s Modern History, out of which I picked a good deal. It had pictures of Chinese gods, and the great hooded serpent which ran strangely in my fancy. There were some law books too, but the old English frightened me from reading them. But above all, what I relished was Stackhouse’s History of the Bible, where there was the picture of the Ark and all the beasts getting into it. This delighted me, because it puzzled me, and many an aching head have I got with poring into it, and contriving how it might be built, with such and such rooms, to hold all the world if there should be another flood, and sometimes settling what pretty beasts should be saved, and what should not, for I would have no ugly or deformed beast in my pretty ark. . . .

“Besides the picture of the Ark, and many others which I have forgot, Stackhouse contained one picture which made more impression upon my childish understanding than all the rest. It was the picture of the raising up of Samuel, which I used to call the Witch of Endor picture. I was always very fond of picking up stories about witches. There was a book called Glanvil on Witches, which used to lie about in this closet; it was thumbed



about, and shewed it had been much read in former times. This was my treasure. Here I used to pick out the strangest stories. My not being able to read them very well probably made them appear more strange and out of the way to me. But I could collect enough to understand that witches were old women who gave themselves up to do mischief;—how, by the help of spirits as bad as themselves, they lamed cattle, and made the corn not grow; and how they made images of wax to stand for people that had done them any injury, or they thought had done them injury; and how they burnt the images before a slow fire, and stuck pins in them; and the persons which these waxen images represented, however far distant, felt all the pains and torments in good earnest, which were inflicted in show upon these images. . . .

“One night that I had been terrified in my sleep with my imaginations, I got out of bed, and crept softly to the adjoining room. My room was next to where my aunt usually sat when she was alone. Into her room I crept for relief from my fears. The old lady was not yet retired to rest, but was sitting with her eyes half open, half closed; her spectacles tottering upon her nose; her head nodding over her prayer-book; her lips mumbling the words as she read them, or half read them, in her dozing posture; her grotesque appearance; her old-fashioned dress, resembling what I had seen in that fatal picture in Stackhouse; all this, with the dead time of night, as it seemed to me, (for I had gone through my first sleep,) all joined to produce a wicked fancy in me, that the form which I had beheld was not my aunt, but some witch. Her mumbling of her prayers confirmed me in this shocking idea. I had read in Glanvil of those wicked creatures reading their prayers *backwards*, and I thought that this was the operation which her lips were at this time employed about. Instead of flying to her friendly lap for that protection which I had so often experienced when I have been weak and timid, I shrunk back terrified and bewildered to my bed, where I lay in broken sleeps and miserable fancies, till the morning, which I had so much reason to wish for, came.

“My fancies a little wore away with the light, but an impression was fixed, which could not for a long time be done away. In the day-time, when my father and mother were about the house, when I saw them familiarly speak to my aunt, my fears





SAUL CONSULTING A WITCH AT ENDOR  
FROM STACKHOUSE'S *NEW HISTORY OF THE HOLY BIBLE*



all vanished ; and when the good creature has taken me upon her knees, and shewn me any kindness more than ordinary, at such times I have melted into tears, and longed to tell her what naughty foolish fancies I had had of her. But when night returned, that figure which I had seen recurred ;—the posture, the half-closed eyes, the mumbling and muttering which I had heard, a confusion was in my head, *who* it was I had seen that night :—it was my aunt, and it was not my aunt :—it was that good creature who loved me above all the world, engaged at her good task of devotions—perhaps praying for some good to me. Again, it was a witch,—a creature hateful to God and man, reading backwards the good prayers ; who would perhaps destroy me. In these conflicts of mind I passed several weeks.”

Certain statements made in the foregoing narrative are corroborated elsewhere. In a letter to Coleridge (quoted on page 114) will be found a further testimony to Aunt Hetty's affection for her nephew ; while her complaint that she was not enough respected is thus repeated in a letter from Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart : “ My father had a sister lived with us—of course, lived with my Mother, her sister-in-law ; they were, in their different ways, the best creatures in the world—but they set out wrong at first. They made each other miserable for full twenty years of their lives. My Mother was a perfect gentlewoman, my Aunt as unlike a gentlewoman as you can possibly imagine a good old woman to be ; so that my dear Mother (who, though you do not know it, is always in my poor head and heart) used to distress and weary her with incessant and unceasing attention and politeness, to gain her affection. The old woman could not return this in kind, and did not know what to make of it—thought it all deceit, and used to hate my Mother with a bitter hatred ; which, of course, was soon returned with interest. A little frankness, and looking into each other's characters at first, would have spared all this, and they would have lived, as they died, fond of each other for the last few years of their life.” One other point that is elsewhere corroborated is Sarah Lamb's devotion to Thomas à Kempis, which Lamb mentions in the *Elia* essay “ My Relations,” as a “ favourite volume ”.

Joseph Glanvill's *Philosophical Considerations Touching Witches and Witchcraft*, and Stackhouse's *History of the*

*Bible*, would perhaps be among Samuel Salt's books to which the children had access. The circumstance that Lamb had put the same experience of fright into the mouth of John Woodvil some seven or eight years earlier than this story of "The Witch Aunt," and that some fourteen years later he transferred it to his own, in the *Elia* essay "Witches and Other Night Fears," may perhaps convince us of its truth.

Probably Aunt Hetty found in her little nephew the understanding that she needed; for imaginative sympathy, of which Charles Lamb had so great a share, is not a graft, but in those who are blessed with it a possession from their earliest days. One of Aunt Hetty's methods of requiting his comforting comprehension of her temperament was very practical. Two passages in the essays bear upon it. In the "Dissertation on Roast Pig" Lamb writes: "My good old aunt, who never parted from me at the end of a holiday without stuffing a sweet-meat, or some nice thing, into my pocket, had dismissed me one evening with a smoking plum-cake, fresh from the oven. In my way to school (it was over London Bridge) a grey-headed old beggar saluted me (I have no doubt at this time of day that he was a counterfeit). I had no pence to console him with, and in the vanity of self-denial, and the very coxcombrity of charity, school-boy-like, I made him a present of—the whole cake!

"I walked on a little, buoyed up, as one is on such occasions, with a sweet soothing of self-satisfaction; but before I had got to the end of the bridge, my better feelings returned, and I burst into tears, thinking how ungrateful I had been to my good aunt, to go and give her good gift away to a stranger, that I had never seen before, and who might be a bad man for aught I knew; and then I thought of the pleasure my aunt would be taking in thinking that I—I myself, and not another—would eat her nice cake—and what should I say to her the next time I saw her—how naughty I was to part with her pretty present—and the odour of that spicy cake came back upon my recollection, and the pleasure and the curiosity I had taken in seeing her make it, and her joy when she sent it to the oven, and how disappointed she would feel that I had never had a bit of it in my mouth at last—and I blamed my impertinent spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness,



and above all I wished never to see the face again of that insidious, good-for-nothing, old grey impostor."<sup>1</sup>

And in the *Elia* essay on Christ's Hospital Aunt Hetty's alleviation of the school kitchen's austerity is thus described (in a passage where Lamb refers to himself as another and to Coleridge as himself): "In lieu of our *half-pickled* Sundays, or *quite fresh* boiled beef on Thursdays (strong as *caro equina*), with detestable marigolds floating in the pail to poison the broth—our scanty mutton crags on Fridays—and rather more savoury, but grudging, portions of the same flesh, rotten-roasted or rare, on the Tuesdays (the only dish which excited our appetites, and disappointed our stomachs, in almost equal proportion)—he had his hot plate of roast veal, or the more tempting griskin (exotics unknown to our palates), cooked in the paternal kitchen (a great thing), and brought him daily by his maid or aunt! I remember the good old relative (in whom love forbade pride) squatting down upon some odd stone in a by-nook of the cloisters, disclosing the viands (of higher regale than those cates which the ravens ministered to the Tishbite); and the contending passions of L. at the unfolding. There was love for the bringer; shame for the thing brought, and the manner of its bringing; sympathy for those who were too many to share in it; and, at top of all, hunger (eldest, strongest of the passions!) predominant, breaking down the stony fences of shame, and awkwardness, and a troubling over-consciousness."

<sup>1</sup> The reference to London Bridge (which occurs also in the letter to Coleridge where the incident is first recorded) makes it just possible that here Lamb is thinking of yet another aunt: for living in the Temple, where Aunt Hetty lived too, he could never have approached either his first school or Christ's Hospital by way of London Bridge. That John Lamb had two sisters we know, and the Southwark aunt may have been the other. In John Lamb's will, made in 1761, he left five guineas to "each of his dear sisters to buy mourning."

## CHAPTER III

## MRS. FIELD AND BLAKESWARE

Lamb's Hertfordshire Kinsmen—Mackery End—Mary and Charles Lamb at the Farm—Miss Sarah Bruton—The Plumers—"The Young Mahometan"—Blakesware—Grandmother Field—Widford—"The Grandame"—The Twelve Cæsars—"Gone or Going."

IN the story of "The Witch Aunt" from which I have quoted, the little frightened child was cured by a visit to a relative. "I soon," he says, "learned to laugh at witch stories; and when I returned after three or four months absence to our own house, my good aunt appeared to me in the same light in which I had viewed her from my infancy, before that foolish fancy possessed me, or rather, I should say, more kind, more fond, more loving than before."

If, as I think, the story of the imaginary Maria Howe and the story of the real little Charles Lamb are one, and true, there were but two relations whom he would have visited; and these were his grandmother Field, at Blakesware, and her married sister Mrs. Gladman, at Mackery End, both in Hertfordshire, the county of which, affectionately remembering these early associations, Lamb, in later life, by a pretty fiction, declared himself a "native." Probably the visit which cured him of the morbid fancy concerning his aunt was to Blakesware, for at that time he must have been six or seven; but since there is no doubt that his first journey into Hertfordshire, as a conscious observer, took him to his great-aunt Gladman's, we will pause at Mackery End before passing on to Blakesware.

"The oldest thing I remember," Lamb says in the *Elia* essay, "is Mackery End. . . I can just remember having been there, on a visit to a great-aunt, when I was a child, under the care of Bridget." This would be, let us suppose, in 1779 or thereabout; and it was, I think, the same visit that is described with so much simple charm by Mary Lamb in *Louisa Manners'*

story, in *Mrs. Leicester's School*, a narrative containing several little touches that suggest personal experience. In reading it as a biographical document we should, I think, for “grandmamma” substitute great-aunt; for the girl-narrator of the story, Charles Lamb, then a little boy of four; and for “my sister Sarah” Mary Lamb herself. These substitutions will perhaps be found rather confusing, but the student of Lamb’s writings—and here of his sister’s too—must be prepared for many examples of exchanged or fused identity and freakish mystification. “Grandmamma,” says the little girl in the story, or, as we are translating it, the little Charles Lamb; “Grandmamma” (that is, my great-aunt Gladman) “was very glad to see me, and she was very sorry that I did not remember her, though I had been so fond of her when she was in town but a few months before. I was quite ashamed of my bad memory. My sister Sarah shewed me all the beautiful places about grandmamma’s house. She first took me into the farm-yard, and I peeped into the barn; there I saw a man threshing, and as he beat the corn with his flail, he made such a dreadful noise that I was frightened and ran away: my sister persuaded me to return; she said Will Tasker was very goodnatured: then I went back, and peeped at him again; but as I could not reconcile myself to the sound of his flail, or the sight of his black beard, we proceeded to see the rest of the farm-yard. . . . The hens were feeding all over the yard, and the prettiest little chickens, they were feeding too, and little yellow ducklings that had a hen for their mamma. She was so frightened if they went near the water. Grandmamma says a hen is not esteemed a very wise bird.

“The time I passed at my grandmamma’s is always in my mind. Sometimes I think of the good-natured pied cow, that would let me stroke her, while the dairy-maid was milking her. Then I fancy myself running after the dairy-maid into the nice clean dairy, and see the pans full of milk and cream. Then I remember the wood-house; it had once been a large barn, but being grown old, the wood was kept there. My sister and I used to peep about among the faggots to find the eggs the hens sometimes left there. Birds’ nests we might not look for. Grandmamma was very angry once, when Will Tasker brought home a bird’s nest, full of pretty speckled eggs, for me. She



sent him back to the hedge with it again. She said, the little birds would not sing any more, if their eggs were taken away from them.

“A hen, she said, was a hospitable bird, and always laid more eggs than she wanted, on purpose to give her mistress to make puddings and custards with.

“I do not know which pleased grandmamma best, when we carried her home a lap-full of eggs, or a few violets; for she was particularly fond of violets. . . .”

Finally we have this passage, which must surely be an authentic recollection: old Spot at any rate sounds very real—“When the currants and gooseberries were quite ripe, grandmamma had a sheep-shearing. All the sheep stood under the trees to be sheared. They were brought out of the field by old Spot, the shepherd. I stood at the orchard-gate, and saw him drive them all in. When they had cropped off all their wool, they looked very clean, and white, and pretty; but, poor things, they ran shivering about with cold, so that it was a pity to see them. Great preparations were making all day for the sheep-shearing supper. Sarah said, a sheep-shearing was not to be compared to a harvest-home, *that* was so much better, for that then the oven was quite full of plum-pudding, and the kitchen was very hot indeed with roasting beef; yet I can assure you there was no want at all of either roast beef or plum-pudding at the sheep-shearing.

“My sister and I were permitted to sit up till it was almost dark, to see the company at supper. They sate at a long oak table, which was finely carved, and as bright as a looking-glass.

“I obtained a great deal of praise that day, because I replied so prettily when I was spoken to. My sister was more shy than me; never having lived in London was the reason of that. After the happiest day bedtime will come! We sate up late; but at last grandmamma sent us to bed: yet though we went to bed we heard many charming songs sung: to be sure we could not distinguish the words, which was a pity, but the sound of their voices was very loud and very fine indeed.

“The common supper that we had every night was very cheerful. Just before the men came out of the field, a large faggot was flung on the fire; the wood used to crackle and blaze, and smell delightfully: and then the crickets, for they loved the fire,



they used to sing, and old Spot, the shepherd, who loved the fire as well as the crickets did, he used to take his place in the chimney corner; after the hottest day in summer, there old Spot used to sit. It was a seat within the fire-place, quite under the chimney, and over his head the bacon hung. When old Spot was seated, the milk was hung in a skillet over the fire, and then the men used to come and sit down at the long white table."

On this first visit, the farm, Lamb tells us in the *Elia* essay "Mackery End," "was in the occupation of a substantial yeoman, who had married my grandmother's sister. His name was Gladman. My grandmother was a Bruton, married to a Field." Lamb added—he was writing in 1821—that the Gladmans and the Brutons were still flourishing in that part of the county, but the Fields were almost extinct.

A Miss Sarah Bruton was living at Wheathampstead in 1905, and on her wall I saw a pair of oval portraits of very charming young women—possibly two of the comely Brutons of whom Lamb speaks later. The Fields are now, I fear, quite extinct. Mackery End is a hamlet some three miles from Wheathampstead, and rather nearer to Harpenden—consisting of a large house, some cottages, and the farm where the children stayed. The house has been refronted but otherwise is as it was in Lamb's day, and one can sit, as I have done, in the very room where he must have sat, both as a very little boy, and again, somewhere about 1815, when he and his sister and Barron Field walked thither, as he describes with so much charm in the *Elia* essay.<sup>1</sup> We shall return to Mackery End in a later chapter, on the occasion of this second visit; meanwhile it is time to say something of Mary Field, Mrs. Gladman's sister, and Lamb's other Hertfordshire friend.

That Mary Field was born a Bruton is all we know; while of Mr. Field—Elizabeth Lamb's father and Charles Lamb's maternal grandfather—we have no knowledge. Lamb probably never saw him. Since it is on record that Mrs. Field was for upwards of fifty years a servant of the Plumer family, it is likely either

<sup>1</sup> Lamb says, in the essay, that more than forty years had elapsed since his first visit, but this cannot have been the case, for Barron Field was out of England from the summer of 1816 to 1824, and the essay was published in 1821. If 1815 were the date, then the intervening years would number some thirty-six or seven.

that Mr. Field died when his wife was very young or that he also served the same employers.

The Plumers occupy so interesting a place in the background of Lamb's life that a few words on the family may well come at this point ; and I cannot do better than reproduce an account of them from an article by Mr. C. E. Johnson in the *Home Counties Magazine*. The earliest Plumer whom we need call forth was Colonel John Plumer, the son of John Plumer of Windsor. "In 1678 he married Mary, daughter of William Hale of King's Walden, Herts, by whom he had four sons and four daughters ; one of the latter, Anne, married James, seventh Earl of Abercorn. In 1683 he bought Blakesware, and was sheriff in 1689, and in 1701 bought New Place [at Gilston, also in Hertfordshire]. He died in 1719, and was buried beside his wife in Eastwick Church. New Place and Blakesware went to his second son, William Plumer [Mrs. Field's first employer], who married, in 1731, Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Byde, Esq., of Ware Park, and had several children by her. He was M.P. for the county in 1754, and died in 1767, aged eighty, survived by his wife, who lived at Blakesware with the younger children till her death in 1778, whilst the eldest son, William [whom Lamb calls a fine old Whig], lived at New Place. [It was after her death in 1778, when Lamb was three, that Mrs. Field assumed sole control of the house, which she held till her own death in 1792.] William Plumer had married, in 1760, Frances, daughter of the seventh Viscount Falkland, but she died in 1761 without issue. In 1791 he married his cousin, Jane Hamilton, daughter of Hon. George Hamilton, canon of Windsor, and granddaughter of the Earl of Abercorn and Anne Plumer. . . .

"In 1822 William Plumer died ; he had been M.P. for the county from 1768 to 1807, and for Higham Ferrers from 1812 till his death. . . . He was aged eighty-six, and was buried at Eastwick. Being without issue he left his properties of Gilston Park (as New Place was now called) and Blakesware to his widow, apparently with an understanding that the old house at Blakesware, which was built by Sir Thomas Leventhorpe about 1640, should be pulled down. . . . Mrs. Plumer lived on at Gilston Park, where she kept great state, driving about the country in a huge four-horse chariot, preceded by outriders in livery ; and she so blocked up the neighbouring lanes that she had to have

‘bays’ or ‘turn-outs’ cut in the hedges to allow other carriages to pass. In 1825 she married Captain R. J. Lewin, R.N., who died two years later. She then married Robert Ward (author of *Tremaine*) who assumed the name of Plumer Ward. . . . In 1831 Mrs. Plumer died without issue, leaving Gilston Park to her husband, who was high sheriff in 1832. He spent most of the remainder of his life abroad, and died in 1846.”

We have seen that from 1778, when Mrs. Plumer died, until 1792, Mrs. Field was in sole charge of Blakesware House. Lamb was too young to know Blakesware until after his grandmother reigned supreme there, and he thus escaped that risk of meeting with the house’s rightful owner, and irksomeness of avoiding her, which might have impaired all his pleasure ; but that Mary Lamb knew Mrs. Plumer we may feel certain from her story of “The Young Mahometan” told by Margaret Green in *Mrs. Leicester’s School*. In 1778 Mary Lamb was fourteen, but exactly at what time in her life she had lived with her grandmother we do not know ; almost certainly before Charles was born, in 1775. The actual history of the young Mahometan may have been largely invented, but substituting “Mrs. Plumer” for “Mrs. Beresford,” “my grandmother” for “my mother,” and “Mary” for “Margaret,” we may assume much of the following account to be true.

“Mrs. Beresford lived in a large old family mansion ; she kept no company, and never moved except from the breakfast-parlour to the eating-room, and from thence to the drawing-room to tea. Every morning when she first saw me, she used to nod her head very kindly, and say, ‘How do you do, little Margaret?’ But I do not recollect she ever spoke to me during the remainder of the day ; except indeed after I had read the psalms and the chapters, which was my daily task ; then she used constantly to observe, that I improved in my reading, and frequently added, ‘I never heard a child read so distinctly.’

“She had been remarkably fond of needle-work, and her conversation with my mother was generally the history of some pieces of work she had formerly done ; the dates when they were begun, and when finished ; what had retarded their progress, and what had hastened their completion. If occasionally any other events were spoken of, she had no other chronology to reckon by, than in the recollection of what carpet, what sofa-cover, what set of chairs, were in the frame at that time.



“I believe my mother is not particularly fond of needle-work ; for in my father’s lifetime I never saw her amuse herself in this way ; yet, to oblige her kind patroness, she undertook to finish a large carpet, which the old lady had just begun when her eyesight failed her. All day long my mother used to sit at the frame, talking of the shades of the worsted, and the beauty of the colours ;—Mrs. Beresford seated in a chair near her, and, though her eyes were so dim she could hardly distinguish one colour from another, watching through her spectacles the progress of the work.

“When my daily portion of reading was over, I had a taste of needle-work, which generally lasted half an hour. I was not allowed to pass more time in reading or work, because my eyes were very weak, for which reason I was always set to read in the large-print Family Bible. I was very fond of reading ; and when I could unobserved steal a few minutes as they were intent on their work, I used to delight to read in the historical part of the Bible ; but this, because of my eyes, was a forbidden pleasure ; and the Bible never being removed out of the room, it was only for a short time together that I dared softly to lift up the leaves and peep into it.

“As I was permitted to walk in the garden or wander about the house whenever I pleased, I used to leave the parlour for hours together, and make out my own solitary amusement as well as I could. My first visit was always to a very large hall, which, from being paved with marble, was called the marble hall. In this hall, while Mrs. Beresford’s husband was living, the tenants used to be feasted at Christmas.

“The heads of the twelve Cæsars were hung round the hall. Every day I mounted on the chairs to look at them, and to read the inscriptions underneath, till I became perfectly familiar with their names and features.<sup>1</sup>

“Hogarth’s prints were below the Cæsars : I was very fond of looking at them, and endeavouring to make out their meaning.

“An old broken battledore, and some shuttlecocks with most of the feathers missing, were on a marble slab in one corner of

<sup>1</sup>In a letter to Southey (Oct. 31st, 1799) Lamb also says that the Cæsars hung. Elsewhere he calls them busts. Mary Lamb suggests that they were medallions ; or she may mean that they stood on hanging brackets.



the hall, which constantly reminded me that there had once been younger inhabitants here than the old lady and her grey-headed servants. In another corner stood a marble figure of a satyr: every day I laid my hand on his shoulder to feel how cold he was.

“This hall opened into a room full of family portraits. They were all in the dresses of former times: some were old men and women, and some were children. I used to long to have a fairy’s power to call the children down from their frames to play with me. One little girl in particular, who hung by the side of a glass door which opened into the garden, I often invited to walk there with me, but she still kept her station—one arm round a little lamb’s neck, and in her hand a large bunch of roses.

“From this room I usually proceeded to the garden.

“When I was weary of the garden I wandered over the rest of the house. The best suite of rooms I never saw by any other light than what glimmered through the tops of the window-shutters, which however served to shew the carved chimney-pieces, and the curious old ornaments about the rooms; but the worked furniture and carpets, of which I heard such constant praises, I could have but an imperfect sight of, peeping under the covers which were kept over them, by the dim light; for I constantly lifted up a corner of the envious cloth, that hid these highly-praised rarities from my view.

“The bed-rooms were also regularly explored by me, as well to admire the antique furniture, as for the sake of contemplating the tapestry hangings, which were full of Bible history. The subject of the one which chiefly attracted my attention, was Hagar and her son Ishmael. Every day I admired the beauty of the youth, and pitied the forlorn state of him and his mother in the wilderness.”

These passages have the circumstantiality of truth. Among the Lamb children Mrs. Field’s favourite seems (like her daughter’s) to have been John. Mary remarks in one of her brother’s letters, after the tragedy, that her grandmother used often to complain of her “poor moythered brains.” And Charles Lamb also gives one example of a certain lack of tenderness in the old lady. In a little essay which he wrote to accompany an engraving in the *Gem* for 1830, he portrayed his grandmother in what, I think,

we may feel assured, even allowing for his tendency to whimsical deception, were the colours of life. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. I am always disposed to add, so are those of Grandmothers. *Mine* . . . had never-failing pretexts of tormenting children for their good. I was a chit then; and I well remember when a fly had got into a corner of my eye, and I was complaining of it to her, the old Lady deliberately pounded two ounces or more of the finest loaf sugar that could be got, and making me hold open the eye as wide as I could—all innocent of her purpose—she blew from delicate white paper, with a full breath, the whole saccharine contents into the part afflicted, saying, 'There, now the fly is out!' 'Twas most true—a legion of blue-bottles, with the prince of flies at their head, must have dislodged with the torrent and deluge of tears which followed. I kept my own counsel, and my fly in my eye when I had got one, in future, without troubling her dulcet applications for the remedy.

"Then her medicine-case was a perfect magazine of tortures for infants. She seemed to have no notion of the comparatively tender drenches which young internals require—her potions were any thing but milk for babes. Then her sewing up of a cut finger—pricking a whitloe before it was ripe, because she could not see well,—with the aggravation of the pitying tone she did it in.

"But of all her nostrums—rest her soul—nothing came up to the Saturday Night's flannel—that rude fragment of a Witney blanket—Wales spins none so coarse—thrust into the corners of a weak child's eye with soap that might have absterged an Ethiop, whitened the hands of Duncan's She-murderer, and scowered away Original Sin itself."

Yet in spite of rough remedies, there seems to have been no want of sympathy between Mrs. Field and her younger grandson, however she may have failed with Mary; and (despite the fly in the eye) the tenderest memories of Charles Lamb's childhood and boyhood are entwined about Blakesware and its presiding spirit. Portions of the essays "Blakesmoor in H—shire," "Dream Children" and "The Last Peach" form the best introduction to Mrs. Field and her little kingdom. "Every plank and pannel of that house"—Lamb wrote in "Blakesmoor in H—shire," after visiting the scene of destruction—"for me

had magic in it. The tapestried bed-rooms—tapestry so much better than painting—not adorning merely, but peopling the wainscots—at which childhood ever and anon would steal a look, shifting its coverlid (replaced as quickly) to exercise its tender courage in a momentary eye-encounter with those stern bright visages, staring reciprocally—all Ovid on the walls, in colours vividder than his descriptions. Actæon in mid sprout, with the unappeasable prudery of Diana ; and the still more provoking, and almost culinary coolness of Dan Phœbus, eel-fashion, deliberately divesting of Marsyas.”

The late Mrs. Coe (Elizabeth Hunt of Widford), whom we meet in Chapter XLV, remembered Blakesware as it used to be in the late twenties of the last century. It was then, she told me, only partly destroyed. She recollected particularly the figure of Nebuchadnezzar eating grass, in one of the pieces of tapestry, with his long fingers like bird’s claws. It was one of the great treats for her and her playmates to pretend to take rides in Mrs. Plumer’s state coach, which Lamb’s friend John Lily, the postillion (to whom we come directly), had often driven.

To take up Lamb’s story again : “Then, that haunted room—in which old Mrs. Battle died—whereinto I have crept, but always in the day-time, with a passion of fear ; and a sneaking curiosity, terror-tainted, to hold communication with the past.—*How shall they build it up again ?*

“It was an old deserted place, yet not so long deserted but that traces of the splendour of past inmates were everywhere apparent. Its furniture was still standing—even to the tarnished gilt leather battledores, and crumbling feathers of shuttlecocks in the nursery, which told that children had once played there. But I was a lonely child, and had the range at will of every apartment, knew every nook and corner, wondered and worshipped everywhere.

“The solitude of childhood is not so much the mother of thought, as it is the feeder of love, and silence, and admiration. So strange a passion for the place possessed me in those years, that, though there lay—I shame to say how few roods distant from the mansion—half hid by trees, what I judged some romantic lake, such was the spell which bound me to the house, and such my carefulness not to pass its strict and proper precincts, that the idle waters lay unexplored for me ; and not



till late in life, curiosity prevailing over elder devotion, I found, to my astonishment, a pretty brawling brook had been the *Lacus Incognitus* of my infancy. Variegated views, extensive prospects—and those at no great distance from the house—I was told of such—what were they to me, being out of the boundaries of my Eden?—So far from a wish to roam, I would have drawn, methought, still closer the fences of my chosen prison; and have been hemmed in by a yet securer cincture of those excluding garden walls. . . .

“I was here as in a lonely temple. Snug firesides—the low-built roof—parlours ten feet by ten—frugal boards, and all the homeliness of home—these were the condition of my birth—the wholesome soil which I was planted in. Yet, without impeachment to their tenderest lessons, I am not sorry to have had glances of something beyond; and to have taken, if but a peep, in childhood, at the contrasting accidents of a great fortune.

“To have the feeling of gentility, it is not necessary to have been born gentle. The pride of ancestry may be had on cheaper terms than to be obliged to an importunate race of ancestors; and the coatless antiquary in his unemblazoned cell, revolving the long line of a Mowbray's or De Clifford's pedigree, at those sounding names may warm himself into as gay a vanity as these who do inherit them. The claims of birth are ideal merely, and what herald shall go about to strip me of an idea? Is it trenchant to their swords? can it be hacked off as a spur can? or torn away like a tarnished garter?

“What, else, were the families of the great to us? what pleasure should we take in their tedious genealogies, or their capitulatory brass monuments? What to us the uninterrupted current of their bloods, if our own did not answer within us to a cognate and correspondent elevation.

“Or wherefore, else, O tattered and diminished 'Scutcheon that hung upon the time-worn walls of thy princely stairs, *BLAKESMOOR!* have I in childhood so oft stood poring upon thy mystic characters—thy emblematic supporters, with their prophetic 'Resurgam'—till, every dreg of peasantry purging off, I received into myself Very Gentility? Thou wert first in my morning eyes; and of nights, hast detained my steps from bedward, till it was but a step from gazing at thee to





BLAKESWARE, ABOUT 1795  
FROM A DRAWING IN THE POSSESSION OF MRS. GEORGE NUNN OF BIRFORD



dreaming on thee." The value of these experiences of Blakesware, in his solitary, thoughtful, fanciful childhood, on Lamb's mind can hardly be overestimated. They must have led the little boy into more fantastic avenues of thought than even Samuel Salt's books.

We find Blakesware again in *Rosamund Gray*, written as early as 1798, in one of the passages that are largely autobiographical: "I set out one morning to walk—I reached Widford about eleven in the forenoon—after a slight breakfast at my inn—where I was mortified to perceive, the old landlord did not know me again—(old Thomas Billet—he has often made angle rods for me when a child)—I rambled over all my accustomed haunts.

"Our old house was vacant, and to be sold. I entered, unmolested, into the room that had been my bed-chamber. I kneeled down on the spot where my little bed had stood—I felt like a child—I prayed like one—it seemed as though old times were to return again—I looked round involuntarily, expecting to see some face I knew—but all was naked and mute. The bed was gone. My little pane of painted window, through which I loved to look at the sun, when I awoke in a fine summer's morning, was taken out, and had been replaced by one of common glass. . . .

"I wandered, scarce knowing where, into an old wood, that stands at the back of the house—we called it the *Wilderness*. A well-known *form* was missing, that used to meet me in this place—it was thine, Ben Moxam—the kindest, gentlest, politest, of human beings, yet was he nothing higher than a gardener in the family. Honest creature, thou didst never pass me in my childish rambles, without a soft speech, and a smile. I remember thy good-natured face. But there is one thing, for which I can never forgive thee, Ben Moxam—that thou didst join with an old maiden aunt of mine in a cruel plot, to lop away the hanging branches of the old fir trees.—I remember them sweeping to the ground.

"I have often left my childish sports to ramble in this place—its glooms and its solitude had a mysterious charm for my young mind, nurturing within me that love of quietness and lonely thinking, which have accompanied me to maturer years."

Again in "The Last Peach," printed in 1825, another Blakes-

ware day is restored. "When a child I was once let loose, by favour of a Nobleman's gardener, into his Lordship's magnificent fruit garden, with free leave to pull the currants and the gooseberries; only I was interdicted from touching the wall fruit. Indeed, at that season (it was the end of Autumn) there was little left. Only on the South wall (can I forget the hot feel of the brick-work?) lingered the one last peach. Now peaches are a fruit I always had, and still have, an almost utter aversion to. There is something to my palate singularly harsh and repulsive in the flavour of them. I know not by what demon of contradiction inspired, but I was haunted by an irresistible desire to pluck it. Tear myself as often as I would from the spot, I found myself still recurring to it, till, maddening with desire (desire I cannot call it), with wilfulness rather—without appetite—against appetite, I may call it—in an evil hour I reached out my hand, and plucked it. Some few rain drops just then fell; the sky (from a bright day) became overcast; and I was a type of our first parents, after the eating of that fatal fruit. I felt myself naked and ashamed; stripped of my virtue, spiritless. The downy fruit, whose sight rather than savour had tempted me, dropt from my hand, never to be tasted. All the commentators in the world cannot persuade me but that the Hebrew word in the second chapter of Genesis, translated apple, should be rendered peach. Only this way can I reconcile that mysterious story."

But the most beautiful of all the writings of brother or sister on their second home is the *Elia* essay "Dream Children," where Lamb feigns to be narrating to his children some of the old memories: "Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when *they* were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk [Hertfordshire] (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved



out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding.

“ Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by every body, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining county; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house [Gilston], where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, ‘ that would be foolish indeed.’

“ And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psalter by heart, ay, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious.

“ Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up

and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said ‘those innocents would do her no harm;’ and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she—and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous.

“Then I told how good she was to all her grand-children, having us to the great-house in the holydays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the Twelve Cæsars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken pannels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then,—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings,—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which, not unobserved by Alice, he had meditated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant.

“Then in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grand-children, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L.—, because he was so handsome and spirited

a youth, and a king to the rest of us, and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out—and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries—and how their uncle grew up to man’s estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of every body, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially. . . .”

In addition to this picture of Mrs. Field we have Lamb’s character sketch of her in the poem “The Grandame,” written in 1796, four years after her death on July 31st, 1792, aged seventy-nine. Her grave is in Widford Churchyard.

A plain stone barely tells  
The name and date to the chance passenger.  
For lowly born was she, and long had eat,  
Well-earned, the bread of service :—her’s was else  
A mounting spirit, one that entertained  
Scorn of base action, deed dishonourable,  
Or aught unseemly. I remember well  
Her reverend image : I remember, too,  
With what a zeal she served her master’s house ;  
And how the prattling tongue of garrulous age  
Delighted to recount the oft-told tale  
Or anecdote domestic. Wise she was,  
And wondrous skilled in genealogies,  
And could in apt and voluble terms discourse  
Of births, of titles, and alliances ;  
Of marriages, and intermarriages ;  
Relationship remote, or near of kin ;  
Of friends offended, family disgraced—  
Maiden high-born, but wayward, disobeying  
Parental strict injunction, and regardless  
Of unmixed blood, and ancestry remote,  
Stooping to wed with one of low degree.  
But these are not thy praises ; and I wrong  
Thy honor’d memory, recording chiefly  
Things light or trivial. Better ’twere to tell,  
How with a nobler zeal, and warmer love,  
She served her *heavenly master*.

Blakesware house was pulled down in the late twenties or early thirties of the last century, and everything was moved to Gilston. Gilston was emptied of its treasures, which were sold by auction, in 1851, when the Twelve Cæsars, the Judgment Chair, and the



tapestry were dispersed, no one can tell me whither. I have a suspicion that some of the heads that lurk among the greenery in the Old Rye House pleasure gardens at Broxbourne may have come from Blakesware, for the tenant of that odd pleasure resort in 1851 is known to have been a purchaser at the sale; but certainty is out of the question. Somewhere Lamb's Twelve Cæsars must surely be, and somewhere the Judgment Chair; such relics are not destroyed.

The present Blakesware house, the seat of the Gosselin family, stands on the crest of the hill over which, as I suppose, the Wilderness of Lamb's day was spread. Of the old house nothing remains save some grass-covered mounds among trees in the hollow, beneath which are piles of bricks that have never been moved. Standing there one can reconstruct the scene, and by walking a few steps towards the river Ash can see for oneself the *Lacus Incognitus* of Lamb's childhood.

Blakesware is but a step from Widford, where in the churchyard lie not only Mary Field but other of her friends and Lamb's friends, notably Mrs. Randal Norris. The present spire of the church is not that mentioned at the beginning of "The Grandame," but a new one of recent construction. As a boy Lamb probably had many acquaintances in Widford village, several of whom we meet in the wistful verses which, under the title "Gone or Going," he wrote in 1827 for Hone's *Table Book*.

Fine merry franions,  
 Wanton companions,  
 My days are ev'n banyans  
     With thinking upon ye;  
 How Death, that last stinger,  
 Finis-writer, end-bringer,  
 Has laid his chill finger,  
     Or is laying on ye.

There's rich Kitty Wheatley,  
 With footing it featly  
 That took me completely,  
     She sleeps in the Kirk House;  
 And poor Polly Perkin,  
 Whose Dad was still firking  
 The jolly ale firkin,  
     She's gone to the Work-house;



Fine Gard'ner, Ben Carter  
 (In ten counties no smarter)  
 Has ta'en his departure  
     For Proserpine's orchards ;  
 And Lily, postillion,  
 With cheeks of vermilion,  
 Is one of a million  
     That fill up the church-yards ;

And, lusty as Dido,  
 Fat Clemitson's widow  
 Flits now a small shadow  
     By Stygian hid ford ;  
 And good master Clapton  
 Has thirty years nap't on  
 The ground he last hap't on,  
     Intomb'd by fair Widford ;

And gallant Tom Dockwra,  
 Of nature's finest crockery,  
 Now but thin air and mockery,  
     Lurks by Avernus,  
 Whose honest grasp of hand  
 Still, while his life did stand,  
 At friend's or foe's command  
     Almost did burn us.

Kitty Wheatley was perhaps a relative of Joseph Whately, vicar of Widford in the latter half of the eighteenth century, who married Jane Plumer. Of Polly Perkin and Tom Dockwra I can discover nothing ; but Ben Carter was the gardener at Blakesware, whom Lamb in the passage from *Rosamund Gray* which is quoted above calls Ben Moxam ; John Lily, as we have seen, was postillion there ; while Clemitson was the Widford innkeeper, whom Lamb calls Thomas Billet in *Rosamund Gray*. The churchyard has many Claptons beneath its turf.

## CHAPTER IV

## FIRST SCHOOL AND FIRST THEATRE

1780-1781

Mrs. Reynolds—Hood's Recollections—Miss Pearson's Toyshop—William Bird's Academy—Captain Starkey—"Artaxerxes" and "Harlequin's Invasion"—Mary Lamb's First Play.

FROM the time when Charles Lamb went to Christ's Hospital in 1782, when he was seven and a half, we know more or less accurately how his life was spent; but his earlier childhood remains vague. We can guess a little with the help of *Mrs. Leicester's School* and the *Poetry for Children*; the essays, as we have seen, tell rather more; but that is all. One remark, quoted by Talfourd, shows us, however, that he was thoughtful even as a child. Mary Lamb was taking him through a churchyard filled with testimonies to the virtues of the dead, when he asked, "Mary, where are the naughty people buried?" This must have been after he had learned to read, which he did, we know, very young and very quickly, under his sister's care. He knew his letters before he could talk. Two pieces of stray information which *Elia* affords is (according to "New Year's Eve") that he had small-pox at five, and (according to "Dream Children") that he was once so lame that he had to be carried about by his brother.

It would be I think after Lamb had recovered from small-pox that he began to have lessons from Mrs. Reynolds. I wish I could describe more fully the lady whom Lamb refers to as his schoolmistress, but the feat is now impossible. Her maiden name was Chambers and her father had lived in the Temple; probably she was the "prim Betsy Chambers" of Lamb's verses "Gone or Going":—

—prim Betsy Chambers  
 Decayed in her members  
 No longer remembers  
 Things as she once did.

Mrs. Reynolds was separated from her husband, of whom we know nothing. She touches literature at two points, for not only did she teach Charles Lamb his rudiments but she had been acquainted with Goldsmith, and had read "The Deserted Village" in his own copy, which he lent her for the purpose.

Until quite late in Lamb's life Mrs. Reynolds was a visitor at his various rooms, and her name occurs from time to time in the correspondence. In 1806, for example, Mary Lamb records that a pension of £10 has been conferred upon her by the Temple Society; later, Lamb was to pension her himself, with a liberality far exceeding that of the Law. Of Mrs. Reynolds's personal peculiarities in later life, when she must have been at least seventy, we have a glimpse in *Hood's Own*, in the author's account of his intimacy with Lamb in the Islington and Enfield days. Among Lamb's guests, says Hood, "you occasionally saw an elderly lady, formal, fair, and flaxen-wigged, looking remarkably like a flaxen-haired doll,—and she *did* visit some friends or relations, at a toy-shop near St. Dunstan's. When she spoke, it was as if by an artificial apparatus, through some defect in her palate, and she had a slight limp and a twist in her figure, occasioned—what would Hannah More have said!—by running down Greenwich Hill! This antiquated personage had been Lamb's School-mistress—and on this retrospective consideration, though she could hardly have taught him more than to read his native tongue—he allowed her in her decline a yearly sum, equal to—what shall I say?—to the stipend which some persons of fortune deem sufficient for the active services of an all-accomplished gentlewoman in the education of their children, say, thirty pounds per annum."

(The mention of the toyshop near St. Dunstan's lets us into a little secret in connection with Mary Lamb's story of the "Visit to the Cousins," in *Mrs. Leicester's School*. In that pretty tale, Emily Barton, the narrator, mentions St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet Street, and its iron figures which, like those in Cheap-side to-day, struck the time: the figures whose removal some years later caused Lamb to shed tears. She continues: "We

waited some time that I might see this sight, but just at the moment they were striking, I happened to be looking at a toy-shop that was on the other side of the way, and unluckily missed it. Papa said, 'Never mind; we will go into the toy-shop, and I dare say we shall find something that will console you for your disappointment.' 'Do,' said mamma, 'for I knew Miss Pearson, that keeps this shop, at Weymouth, when I was a little girl, not much older than Emily. Take notice of her;—she is a very intelligent old lady.' Mamma made herself known to Miss Pearson, and shewed me to her, but I did not much mind what they said; no more did papa,—for we were busy among the toys." Now this Miss Pearson, whom we find in the London Directory at No. 7 Fleet Street, must, I think, have been Mrs. Reynolds's friend: hence the kindly little advertisement of her shop.)

Lamb passed, probably about 1781, when he was six, from Mrs. Reynolds's simple instruction to the Academy of Mr. William Bird, in Bond Stables (since destroyed), off Fetter Lane, whither Mary had preceded him; and many years afterwards he set down some of their united reminiscences of the school, in some notes on an oddity named Starkey who had been one of Bird's assistants. Starkey had declined upon bad days, and, an inmate of a workhouse, had written his memoirs, wherein he stated that as a youth he was apprenticed to Mr. William Bird, "the eminent writer and teacher of languages and mathematics." The phrase happily caught Lamb's eye, and he wrote as follows in 1825, some forty-four years after:—

"I was a scholar of that 'eminent writer' that he speaks of; but Starkey had quitted the school about a year before I came to it. Still the odour of his merits had left a fragrancy upon the recollection of the elder pupils. The school-room stands where it did, looking into a discoloured dingy garden in the passage leading from Fetter Lane into Bartlett's Buildings. It is still a School, though the main prop, alas! has fallen so ingloriously; and bears a Latin inscription over the entrance in the Lane, which was unknown in our humbler times. Heaven knows what 'languages' were taught in it then; I am sure that neither my Sister nor myself brought any out of it, but a little of our native English. By 'mathematics,' reader, must be understood 'ciphering.' It was in fact a humble day-school,



at which reading and writing were taught to us boys in the morning, and the same slender erudition was communicated to the girls, our sisters, &c. in the evening. Now Starkey presided, under Bird, over both establishments. In my time, Mr. Cook, now or lately a respectable Singer and Performer at Drury-lane Theatre, and Nephew to Mr. Bird, had succeeded to him.

“I well remember Bird. He was a squat, corpulent, middle-sized man, with something of the gentleman about him, and that peculiar mild tone—especially while he was inflicting punishment—which is so much more terrible to children, than the angriest looks and gestures. Whippings were not frequent; but when they took place, the correction was performed in a private room adjoining, whence we could only hear the plaints, but saw nothing. This heightened the decorum and the solemnity. But the ordinary public chastisement was the bastinado, a stroke or two on the palm with that almost obsolete weapon now—the ferule. A ferule was a sort of flat ruler, widened at the inflicting end into a shape resembling a pear,—but nothing like so sweet—with a delectable hole in the middle, to raise blisters, like a cupping-glass. I have an intense recollection of that disused instrument of torture—and the malignancy, in proportion to the apparent mildness, with which its strokes were applied. The idea of a rod is accompanied with something ludicrous; but by no process can I look back upon this blister-raiser with anything but unmingled horror.—To make him look more formidable—if a pedagogue had need of these heightenings—Bird wore one of those flowered Indian gowns, formerly in use with schoolmasters; the strange figures upon which we used to interpret into hieroglyphics of pain and suffering. But boyish fears apart—Bird I believe was in the main a humane and judicious master.

“O, how I remember our legs wedged in to those uncomfortable sloping desks, where we sat elbowing each other—and the injunctions to attain a free hand, unattainable in that position; the first copy I wrote after, with its moral lesson ‘Art improves Nature;’ the still earlier pothooks and the hangers some traces of which I fear may yet be apparent in this manuscript; the truant looks side-long to the garden, which seemed a mockery of our imprisonment; the prize for best spelling, which had

almost turned my head, and which to this day I cannot reflect upon without a vanity, which I ought to be ashamed of—our little leaden inkstands, not separately subsisting, but sunk into the desks; the bright, punctually-washed morning fingers, darkening gradually with another and another ink-spot: what a world of little associated circumstances, pains and pleasures mingling their quotas of pleasure, arise at the reading of those few simple words—‘Mr. William Bird, an eminent Writer, and Teacher of languages and mathematics in Fetter Lane, Holborn!’”

So far ran Lamb’s own recollections. He then added a reminiscence or two which Mary Lamb supplied. “If any of the girls, she says, who were my school-fellows should be reading, through their aged spectacles, tidings from the dead of their youthful friend Starkey, they will feel a pang, as I do, at ever having teased his gentle spirit. They were big girls, it seems, too old to attend his instructions with the silence necessary; and however old age, and a long state of beggary, seem to have reduced his writing faculties to a state of imbecility, in those days, his language occasionally rose to the bold and figurative, for when he was in despair to stop their chattering, his ordinary phrase was, ‘Ladies, if you will not hold your peace, not all the powers in heaven can make you.’ Once he was missing for a day or two; he had run away. A little old unhappy-looking man brought him back—it was his father—and he did no business in the school that day, but sate moping in a corner, with his hands before his face; and the girls, his tormentors, in pity for his case, for the rest of that day forbore to annoy him.

“I had been there but a few months, adds she, when Starkey, who was the chief instructor of us girls, communicated to us as a profound secret, that the tragedy of ‘Cato’ was shortly to be acted by the elder boys, and that we were to be invited to the representation. That Starkey lent a helping hand in fashioning the actors, she remembers; and but for his unfortunate person, he might have had some distinguished part in the scene to enact; as it was, he had the arduous task of prompter assigned to him, and his feeble voice was heard clear and distinct, repeating the text during the whole performance.”

Such was Charles Lamb’s first school, and, so far as we know, Mary Lamb’s only school.

At about the same time that his formal education began—at the end of 1780—Charles Lamb saw his first play. It was at Drury Lane on December 1st, 1780, and the programme consisted of Arne's opera "Artaxerxes" and the pantomime "Harlequin's Invasion." According to the essay "My First Play" the Lambs went with pit orders presented by godfather Fielde. That essay is so well known that I prefer to quote here from "Playhouse Memoranda" a first sketch for it, written in 1813:—

"Oh when shall I forget first seeing a play, at the age of five or six? It was *Artaxerxes*. Who played, or who sang in it, I know not. Such low ideas as actors' names, or actors' merits, never entered my head. The mystery of delight was not cut open and dissipated for me by those who took me there. It was *Artaxerxes* and *Arbaces* and *Mandane* that I saw, not Mr. Beard, or Mr. Leoni, or Mrs. Kennedy. It was all enchantment and a dream. No such pleasure has since visited me but in dreams. I was in Persia for the time, and the burning idol of their devotion in the Temple almost converted me into a worshipper. I was awe-struck, and believed those significations to be something more than elemental fires. I was, with Uriel, in the body of the sun.—What should I have gained by knowing (as I should have done, had I been born thirty years later) that that solar representation was a mere painted scene, that had neither fire nor light in itself, and that the royal phantoms, which passed in review before me, were but such common mortals as I could see every day out of my father's window? We crush the faculty of delight and wonder in children, by explaining every thing. We take them to the source of the Nile, and shew them the scanty runnings, instead of letting the beginnings of that seven fold stream remain in impenetrable darkness, a mysterious question of wonderment and delight to ages."

The story of Lamb's progress as a playgoer may be taken up from the *Elia* essay: "The next play to which I was taken was the *Lady of the Manor*, of which, with the exception of some scenery, very faint traces are left in my memory. It was followed by a pantomime, called *Lun's Ghost*—a satiric touch, I apprehend, upon Rich, not long since dead—but to my apprehension (too sincere for satire), Lun was as remote a piece of antiquity as Lud—the father of a line of Harlequins—transmitting his dagger of lath (the wooden sceptre) through countless ages. I



saw the primeval Motley come from his silent tomb in a ghastly vest of white patch-work, like the apparition of a dead rainbow. So Harlequins (thought I) look when they are dead.

“My third play followed in quick succession. It was the Way of the World. I think I must have sat at it as grave as a judge; for, I remember, the hysteric affectations of good Lady Wishfort affected me like some solemn tragic passion. Robinson Crusoe followed; in which Crusoe, man Friday, and the parrot, were as good and authentic as in the story.—The clownery and pantaloony of these pantomimes have clean passed out of my head. I believe, I no more laughed at them, than at the same age I should have been disposed to laugh at the grotesque Gothic heads (seeming to me then replete with devout meaning) that gape, and grin, in stone around the inside of the old Round Church (my church) of the Templars.” Lamb saw these plays, he adds, in the season 1781-82, when he was from six to seven years old. He tells us that it was not until after the intervention of six or seven more years (for at school all playgoing was inhibited) that he again entered the doors of a theatre. But after that time—from 1789—he was for some years perhaps the finest playgoer in the world.

Mary Lamb, another born playgoer, has also described her first play; at least I think that we may take Emily Barton's story in *Mrs. Leicester's School*—“The Visit to the Cousins”—to be its author's own experience. Charles began with opera; Mary with tragedy, “The Mourning Bride.” “I shall never forget,” she writes, “how delighted I was at the first sight of the house. My little friend and I were placed together in the front, while our mammas retired to the back part of the box to chat by themselves, for they had been so kind as to come very early that I might look about me before the performance began.

“Frederica had been very often at a play. She was very useful in telling me what every thing was. She made me observe how the common people were coming bustling down the benches in the galleries, as if they were afraid they should lose their places. She told me what a crowd these poor people had to go through, before they got into the house. Then she shewed me how leisurely they all came into the pit, and looked about them, before they took their seats. She gave me a charming description of the king and queen at the play, and shewed me where they sate,



and told me how the princesses were drest. It was a pretty sight to see the remainder of the candles lighted; and so it was to see the musicians come up from under the stage. I admired the music very much, and I asked if that was the play. Frederica laughed at my ignorance, and then she told me, when the play began, the green curtain would draw up to the sound of soft music, and I should hear a lady dressed in black say,

‘ Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast; ’

and those were the very first words the actress, whose name was Almeria, spoke. When the curtain began to draw up, and I saw the bottom of her black petticoat, and heard the soft music, what an agitation I was in! But before that we had long to wait. Frederica told me we should wait till all the dress boxes were full, and then the lights would pop up under the orchestra; the second music would play, and then the play would begin.

“This play was the Mourning Bride. It was a very moving tragedy; and after that when the curtain dropt, and I thought it was all over, I saw the most diverting pantomime that ever was seen. I made a strange blunder the next day, for I told papa that Almeria was married to Harlequin at last; but I assure you I meant to say Columbine, for I knew very well that Almeria was married to Alphonso; for she said she was in the first scene.”

## CHAPTER V

## CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

1782-1789

John Lamb's Petition—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Holidays—Food—Matthew Field—James Boyer—Deputy Grecians—"The Rev. Charles Lamb"—Leigh Hunt—Lamb as a Schoolboy—Charles Valentine Le Grice—Samuel Le Grice—Joseph Favell—Pantisocracy—Bob Allen—Thomas Fanshawe Middleton—The Coleridge Memorial.

ON October 9th, 1782, Charles Lamb, a little boy between seven and eight, entered Christ's Hospital. His admission form, which is still preserved at the school, was, in its original petition state, filled in as early as March 30th, 1781. It is a little curious that John Lamb did not sign it, but left that office to his wife; yet so it was. It is also curious that the reason given for the appeal is that the "Petitioner has a wife and three children, and he finds it difficult to maintain and educate his Family without some assistance:" curious, because John Lamb the younger, who was born in 1763, must by that time, one would suppose, have begun to earn money. Mary Lamb, who would be seventeen at the end of the year, was shortly to become a professional needlewoman.

Every boy entering Christ's Hospital had to produce a substantial friend who was prepared to safeguard the school to the sum of £100 against any loss that the scholar's serious misdemeanours might involve. Lamb's guarantor was one Timothy Yeats and not Samuel Salt, but there is little doubt that Salt was the instigator. Yeats I assume to have been a friend of Salt's, put forward for the purpose of eluding some technical difficulty.

The petition was dated March 30th, 1781; Charles was admitted in July, 1782, but not until October 9th was he clothed and received formally into the school. Among the other new boys was one Samuel Taylor Coleridge, aged nearly ten, son of a clergyman in Devonshire; but he was new only to the London school, having already spent a year or so at the juvenile branch at Hertford.

Lamb has told us much about his schooldays, both in the *Elia* essay "Christ's Hospital Five-and-thirty Years Ago" and in the earlier essay on the same topic, written in 1813; but since an odd but characteristic whim prompted him to incorporate many of Coleridge's experiences as his own, his remarks have to be read with care. His schooldays were, I think, probably very pleasant. He liked lessons; he had a few close friends; his home was near at hand and his opportunities for visiting it were numerous. Some idea of the frequency with which he must have hurried through the intervening streets to the Temple may be gained from the *History of Christ's Hospital*, written in 1834 by his schoolfellow A. W. Trollope. There we find a list of holidays independent of the ordinary eleven days at Easter, four weeks in the summer, fifteen days at Christmas and every other Wednesday. "Those days," writes Trollope, "on which *leave* is given to be absent from the Hospital during the whole day, are called *whole-day leaves*. . . . A *ticket* is a small oval medal attached to the button-hole, without which, except on leaves, no boy is allowed to pass the gates. Subjoined is a list of the holidays, which have been hitherto kept at Christ's Hospital; but it is in contemplation to abridge them materially. Of the policy of such a measure grave doubts may fairly be entertained, inasmuch as the vacations are so short as to give sufficient respite neither to master nor scholar; and these occasional breaks, in the arduous duties of the former more especially, enable him to repair the exhausted energies of body and mind by necessary relaxation. If those days, which are marked with an asterisk, fall on a Sunday, they are kept on the Monday following; and likewise the state holidays.

Jan.	25. St. Paul's conversion.	June	29. St. Peter.
	*30. King Charles's martyrdom.	July	25. St. James.
Feb.	2. Candlemas Day.		Thursday after St. James (Nurses' Holiday).
	24. St. Matthias.	Aug.	24. St. Bartholomew.
	Shrove Tuesday.	Sept.	*2. London burnt.
	Ash Wednesday.		*21. St. Matthew.
March	25. Lady Day.		29. St. Michael.
April	23. St. George.	Oct.	18. St. Luke.
	25. St. Mark.		*23. King Edward VI. born.
May	1. St. Philip and St. James.		28. St. Simon and St. Jude.
	*29. Restoration of King Charles II.	Nov.	1. All Saints.
	Ascension Day.		*5. Gunpowder Plot.
	Whit Monday.		*9. Lord Mayor's Day.
	Whit Tuesday.		*17. Queen Elizabeth's birth-day
June	11. St. Barnabas.		30. St. Andrew.
	24. St. John Baptist.	Dec.	21. St. Thomas."

"Also," Trollope adds, "the birthdays of the King and Queen, and the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the King's accession, proclamation, and coronation."

A passage in the *Elia* essay, in which Lamb speaks of himself as L. and which I think may be accepted as truth, tends to support the theory that his schooldays, although perhaps hard, were not disagreeable to him, howsoever they may have been to Coleridge. "I remember," he says, "L. at school; and can well recollect that he had some peculiar advantages, which I and others of his schoolfellows had not. His friends lived in town, and were near at hand; and he had the privilege of going to see them, almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction, which was denied to us. The present worthy sub-treasurer to the Inner Temple [Randal Norris] can explain how that happened. He had his tea and hot rolls in a morning, while we were battenning upon our quarter of a penny loaf—our *crug*—moistened with attenuated small beer, in wooden piggins, smacking of the pitched leathern jack it was poured from. Our Monday's milk porritch, blue and tasteless, and the pease soup of Saturday, coarse and choking, were enriched for him with a slice of 'extraordinary bread and butter,' from the hot-loaf of the Temple. The Wednesday's mess of millet, somewhat less repugnant—we had three banyan to four meat days in the week—was endeared to his palate with a lump of double-refined, and a smack of ginger (to make it go down the more glibly) or the fragrant cinnamon."



And again: "L.'s governor (so we called the patron who presented us to the foundation) lived in a manner under his paternal roof. Any complaint which he had to make was sure of being attended to. This was understood at Christ's, and was an effectual screen to him against the severity of masters, or worse tyranny of the monitors."

Two of the poems in *Poetry for Children*, 1809, seem to me to belong to the early days at Christ's Hospital—perhaps to his first Christmas holidays. The verses (both sets probably from Charles Lamb's pen) take the form of a "Sister's Expostulation on the Brother's Learning Latin," and the "Brother's Reply." The sister begins:—

Shut these odious books up, brother—  
 They have made you quite another  
 Thing from what you us'd to be—  
 Once you lik'd to play with me—  
 Now you leave me all alone,  
 And are so conceited grown  
 With your Latin, you'll scarce look  
 Upon any English book.  
 We had us'd on winter eves  
 To con over Shakespeare's leaves,  
 Or on Milton's harder sense  
 Exercise our diligence—  
 And you would explain with ease  
 The obscurer passages,  
 Find me out the prettiest places,  
 The poetic turns, and graces,  
 Which alas! now you are gone,  
 I must puzzle out alone,  
 And oft miss the meaning quite,  
 Wanting you to set me right.

And so on. Then follows the brother's reply, which is less prettily homely, the end running thus:—

But if all this anger grow  
 From this cause, that you suspect  
 By proceedings indirect,  
 I would keep (as misers pelf)  
 All this learning to myself;  
 Sister, to remove this doubt,  
 Rather than we will fall out,  
 (If our parents will agree)  
 You shall Latin learn with me.

It was not until 1815 that Mary Lamb taught herself Latin, and later in life taught it also to Mary Victoria Novello, to Fanny

Kelly, and to William Hazlitt the younger. It is however quite likely that in these early days she had the groundings from her brother.

For a plain description of Christ's Hospital in Lamb's day (or only a few years later) it is safer, I think, to go to Leigh Hunt than to *Elia*. Leigh Hunt entered the school in 1791, two years after Lamb left it, but he knew many of the same boys and the same masters, and little if anything can have changed. Some of the pleasantest pages of his *Autobiography* describe the old school. Here, for example, is his account of the daily round. "Our routine of life was this. We rose to the call of a bell, at six in summer, and seven in winter; and after combing ourselves, and washing our hands and faces, went, at the call of another bell, to breakfast. All this took up about an hour. From breakfast we proceeded to school, where we remained till eleven, winter and summer, and then had an hour's play. Dinner took place at twelve. Afterwards was a little play till one, when we again went to school, and remained till five in summer and four in winter. At six was the supper. We used to play after it in summer till eight. In winter, we proceeded from supper to bed. On Sundays, the school-time of the other days was occupied in church, both morning and evening; and as the Bible was read to us every day before every meal, and on going to bed, besides prayers and graces, we rivalled the monks in the religious part of our duties." We may here see, probably, the main source of Lamb's curious knowledge of the Bible, which he quotes so often with perfect appositeness—and occasionally so whimsically, as in the phrase "the innutritious one in the Canticles" in the essay "New Year's Eve," which is, I take it, a reference to the Song of Solomon, viii. 8.

Coleridge's long letter to his friend Thomas Poole, narrating the circumstances of his early life, gives us a table of the school meals. "Our diet was very scanty. Every morning a bit of dry bread and some bad small beer. Every evening a larger piece of bread, and cheese or butter, whichever we liked. For dinner,—on Sunday, boiled beef and broth; Monday, bread and butter, and milk and water; Tuesday, roast mutton; Wednesday, bread and butter, and rice milk; Thursday, boiled beef and broth; Friday, boiled mutton and broth; Saturday, bread

and butter, and pease-porridge. Our food was portioned ; and, excepting on Wednesdays, I never had a bellyfull. Our appetites were damped, never satisfied ; and we had no vegetables." In a passage above, and in the account, in Chapter II., of how Aunt Hetty would walk down from the Temple to help out a poor repast with something more sustaining, we have seen that Lamb was not entirely at the mercy of this meagre dietary.

"The Upper and the Lower Grammar Schools," says Lamb in *Elia*, "were held in the same room ; and an imaginary line only divided their bounds. Their character was as different as that of the inhabitants on the two sides of the Pyrenees. The Rev. James Boyer was the Upper Master ; but the Rev. Matthew Field presided over that portion of the apartment, of which I had the good fortune to be a member. We lived a life as careless as birds. We talked and did just what we pleased, and nobody molested us. We carried an accidence, or a grammar, for form ; but, for any trouble it gave us, we might take two years in getting through the verbs deponent, and another two in forgetting all that we had learned about them. There was now and then the formality of saying a lesson, but if you had not learned it, a brush across the shoulders (just enough to disturb a fly) was the sole remonstrance. Field never used the rod ; and in truth he wielded the cane with no great good will—holding it 'like a dancer.' It looked in his hands rather like an emblem than an instrument of authority ; and an emblem, too, he was ashamed of. He was a good easy man, that did not care to ruffle his own peace, nor perhaps set any great consideration upon the value of juvenile time. He came among us, now and then, but often staid away whole days from us ; and when he came, it made no difference to us—he had his private room to retire to, the short time he staid, to be out of the sound of our noise. Our mirth and uproar went on. We had classics of our own, without being beholden to 'insolent Greece or haughty Rome,' that passed current among us—Peter Wilkins—the Adventures of the Hon. Capt. Robert Boyle—the Fortunate Blue Coat Boy—and the like. Or we cultivated a turn for mechanic or scientific operations ; making little sun-dials of paper ; or weaving those ingenious parentheses, called *cat-cradles* ; or making dry peas to dance upon the end of a tin pipe ; or studying the art military over



that laudable game 'French and English,' and a hundred other such devices to pass away the time—mixing the useful with the agreeable—as would have made the souls of Rousseau and John Locke chuckle to have seen us.

"Matthew Field belonged to that class of modest divines who affect to mix in equal proportion the *gentleman*, the *scholar*, and the *Christian*; but, I know not how, the first ingredient is generally found to be the predominating dose in the composition. He was engaged in gay parties, or with his courtly bow at some episcopal levée, when he should have been attending upon us. He had for many years the classical charge of a hundred children, during the four or five first years of their education; and his very highest form seldom proceeded further than two or three of the introductory fables of Phædrus. How things were suffered to go on thus, I cannot guess. Boyer, who was the proper person to have remedied these abuses, always affected, perhaps felt, a delicacy in interfering in a province not strictly his own. I have not been without my suspicions, that he was not altogether displeased at the contrast we presented to his end of the school. We were a sort of Helots to his young Spartans. He would sometimes, with ironic deference, send to borrow a rod of the Under Master, and then, with sardonic grin, observe to one of his upper boys, 'how neat and fresh the twigs looked.' While his pale students were battering their brains over Xenophon and Plato, with a silence as deep as that enjoined by the Samite, we were enjoying ourselves at our ease in our little Goshen. We saw a little into the secrets of his discipline, and the prospect did but the more reconcile us to our lot. His thunders rolled innocuous for us; his storms came near, but never touched us; contrary to Gideon's miracle, while all around were drenched, our fleece was dry. His boys turned out the better scholars; we, I suspect, have the advantage in temper. His pupils cannot speak of him without something of terror allaying their gratitude; the remembrance of Field comes back with all the soothing images of indolence, and summer slumbers, and work like play, and innocent idleness, and Elysian exemptions, and life itself a 'playing holiday.'"

Coleridge tells us nothing of Field, but Leigh Hunt amusingly supplements Lamb's description. "The under grammar-master,



in my time, was the Rev. Mr. Field. He was a good-looking man, very gentlemanly, and always dressed at the neatest. I believe he once wrote a play. He had the reputation of being admired by the ladies. A man of a more handsome incompetence for his situation perhaps did not exist. He came late of a morning; went away soon in the afternoon; and used to walk up and down, languidly bearing his cane, as if it were a lily, and hearing our eternal *Dominuses* and *As in præsentis* with an air of ineffable endurance. Often he did not hear at all. It was a joke with us, when any of our friends came to the door, and we asked his permission to go to them, to address him with some preposterous question wide of the mark; to which he used to assent. We would say, for instance, 'Are you not a great fool, sir?' or, 'Isn't your daughter a pretty girl?' to which he would reply, 'Yes, child.' When he condescended to hit us with the cane, he made a face as if he were taking physic."

Here is Lamb on the other master—the Rev. James Boyer. "B. was a rabid pedant. His English style was cramped to barbarism. His Easter anthems (for his duty obliged him to those periodical flights) were grating as scannel pipes. He would laugh, ay, and heartily, but then it must be at Flaccus's quibble about *Rex*—or at the *tristis severitas in vultu*, or *inspicere in patinas*, of Terence—thin jests, which at their first broaching could hardly have had *vis* enough to move a Roman muscle.—He had two wigs, both pedantic, but of differing omen. The one serene, smiling, fresh powdered, betokening a mild day. The other, an old discoloured, unkempt, angry caxon, denoting frequent and bloody execution. Woe to the school, when he made his morning appearance in his *passy*, or *passionate wig*. No comet expounded surer.—J. B. had a heavy hand. I have known him double his knotty fist at a poor trembling child (the maternal milk hardly dry upon its lips) with a 'Sirrah, do you presume to set your wits at me?'—Nothing was more common than to see him make a head-long entry into the school-room, from his inner recess, or library, and, with turbulent eye, singling out a lad, roar out, 'Od's my life, Sirrah,' (his favourite adjuration) 'I have a great mind to whip you,'—then, with as sudden a retracting impulse, fling back into his lair—and, after a cooling lapse of some minutes (during which all but the culprit had totally forgotten the context) drive headlong out again, piecing out his

imperfect sense, as if it had been some Devil's Litany, with the expletory yell—'and I WILL, too.'—In his gentler moods, when the *rabidus furor* was assuaged, he had resort to an ingenious method, peculiar, for what I have heard, to himself, of whipping the boy, and reading the Debates, at the same time; a paragraph, and a lash between; which in those times, when parliamentary oratory was most at a height and flourishing in these realms, was not calculated to impress the patient with a veneration for the diffuser graces of rhetoric.

"Once, and but once, the uplifted rod was known to fall ineffectual from his hand—when droll squinting W—— having been caught putting the inside of the master's desk to a use for which the architect had clearly not designed it, to justify himself, with great simplicity averred, that *he did not know that the thing had been forewarned*. This exquisite irrecognition of any law antecedent to the *oral* or *declaratory*, struck so irresistibly upon the fancy of all who heard it (the pedagogue himself not excepted) that remission was unavoidable. . . . Perhaps we cannot dismiss him better than with the pious ejaculation of C.—when he heard that his old master was on his death-bed—'Poor J. B.—may all his faults be forgiven; and may he be wafted to bliss by little cherub boys, all head and wings, with no *bottoms* to reproach his sublunary infirmities.'"

Lamb speaks of himself as only a Deputy Grecian, and yet there is no doubt that he enjoyed the advantage of Boyer's tuition, even although that masterful instructor reserved his highest enthusiasm for Grecians absolute. Lamb's character sketch of Boyer is undoubtedly the result of personal study; but there is further and perhaps better evidence in the manuscript book in which, as Trollope tells us in his *History of Christ's Hospital*, it was Boyer's practice to allow his scholars to transcribe exercises of "more than ordinary merit." In this book Coleridge wrote the verses "Julia," "Quæ nocent docent," "Progress of Vice," and his "Monody on Chatterton," and here in 1789 Lamb wrote the lines that follow, his earliest composition of which we have any knowledge:—

#### MILLE VIÆ MORTIS

What time in bands of slumber all were laid,  
To Death's dark court, methought I was convey'd;  
In realms it lay far hid from mortal sight,  
And gloomy tapers scarce kept out the night.



THE REV. JAMES BOVER AND A "GRECIAN"

DETAIL FROM THE PICTURE OF ST. MATTHEW'S DAY AT CHIUSE'S HOSPITAL,  
PAINTED IN 1799 BY T. STOTHARD, R.A., ENGRAVED BY J. G. WALKER.





On ebon throne the King of Terrors sate,  
 Around him stood the ministers of Fate;  
 On fell destruction bent, the murth'rous band  
 Waited attentively his high command.

Here pallid Fear and dark Despair were seen,  
 And Fever here with looks forever lean,  
 Swoln Dropsy, halting Gout, profuse of woes,  
 And Madness fierce and hopeless of repose,

Wide-wasting Plague; but chief in honour stood  
 More-wasting War, insatiable of blood;  
 With starting eye-balls, eager for the word;  
 Already brandish'd was the glitt'ring sword.

Wonder and fear alike had fill'd my breast,  
 And thus the grisly Monarch I address—

“Of earth-born Heroes why should poets sing,  
 “And thee neglect, neglect the greatest King?  
 “To thee ev'n Cæsar's self was forc'd to yield  
 “The glories of Pharsalia's well-fought field.”

When, with a frown, “Vile caitiff, come not here!”  
 Abrupt cried Death; “shall flatt'ry soothe my ear?”  
 “Hence, or thou feel'st my dart!” the Monarch said.  
 Wild terror seiz'd me, and the vision fled.

The discovery of these stanzas was an achievement of the late Mr. Dykes Campbell, and I reproduce his remarks both upon the poem and also upon the book which contained it. “The verses, perhaps, are not conspicuously better than the average of such compositions, though I am fain to detect in them the savour of a somewhat rarer herbage than that on which the normal clever schoolboy is content to browse; but this may be but a fancy, and I will not insist on it. To such rough-and-ready critical apparatus as I am able to apply, Lamb's ‘*Mille Viæ Mortis*’ yields as little promise of ‘Hester’ or ‘The Old Familiar Faces’ as Coleridge's ‘Julia’ or ‘Christabel;’ but it would not be surprising if a more delicate test gave a different result. For the development of Lamb's critical taste was years in advance of Coleridge's—as may be seen by his letters to his friend in 1796, when Lamb was twenty-one and Coleridge twenty-four.”

Of the book itself Mr. Dykes Campbell continues: “It begins with 1783, when Boyer had been already head master for seven years, and it ends with his year of retirement, 1799. It contains in all sixty-five compositions, of which forty-six are in verse and nineteen in prose. The authors were all Grecians but three, and

all 'Exhibitioners' (sent to Oxford or Cambridge at the charge of the Hospital) but four—namely, John Maund, Charles Lamb, B. Oviatt, and W. Thompson. Maund was the Grecian who was not an Exhibitioner—the 'ill-fated M ——' of the 'Elia' essay. Of him and of another, Henry Scott, also ill-fated, who contributed thrice to the book, Lamb says 'the Muse is silent,' and adapts Prior thus—

Finding some of Edward's race  
Unhappy, pass their annals by.

Of Oviatt and W. Thompson no record is available. But here are Lancelot Pepys Stephens, 'kindest of boys and men;' and Trollope, afterwards head master—these two the Damon and Pythias of the institution;" and also Middleton, Thornton, the two Le Grices, Bob Allen and Franklin. "All Lamb's Grecians," Mr. Dykes Campbell continues, "wrote in Boyer's book, and some of Hunt's. His strange, eerie 'C——n' was doubtless Cheslyn; and there is Pitman, who visited Hunt in prison, and became Reader to our Queen when she was Princess Victoria; and Cautley, who had a distinguished career at Cambridge, and to whom, for auld lang syne, Pitman dedicated his Latin Anthology; and John Wood, who was Hunt's 'kind giant,' but who proved, in the cold daylight of his Fellow's rooms at Pembroke, when Hunt visited him at Cambridge, to be a head shorter than his visitor. All these wrote and are written in the 'Liber Aureus' of their noble foundation, but of them all only two, Coleridge and Lamb, in that whose 'golden clasps lock in the golden story' of our national literature."<sup>1</sup>

The Church was the natural end of all Grecians, although Coleridge, Allen, Favell and the younger Le Grice, at any rate, among Lamb's particular friends, succeeded in evading such a destiny. The understanding that holy orders should follow the Grecian rank kept Lamb among the Deputy Grecians: the impediment in his speech, from which he never recovered, and which probably was at its worst in his boyhood, being considered an insuperable obstacle.<sup>2</sup> Posterity has reason to bless

<sup>1</sup> *Illustrated London News*, December 26, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> In what is perhaps the quaintest "literary" novel that has yet been written, a story, by an American lady, entitled *In the Days of Lamb and Coleridge*, which shows considerable research among the documents of the case and a not less diligent invention, the reader is spared nothing of Lamb's conversational infirmity. Many persons thus afflicted hesitate only before labials or dentals; Lamb (in this novel) boggles at all alike. And Coleridge calls him "Cholley."

that stutter. Not that the Church would necessarily have wholly de-Eliated him (the author of *Tristram Shandy* was a clergyman); but one cannot see the Rev. Charles Lamb producing quite such work as came from Charles Lamb of the East India House, and the least differences are not to be thought of. Wordsworth, however, felt otherwise. In his note to his "Ex-tempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg" he wrote: "Lamb was a good Latin scholar, and probably would have gone to college upon one of the School foundations but for the impediment in his speech. Had such been his lot, he would have probably been preserved from the indulgences of social humours and fancies which were often injurious to himself and causes of severe regret to his friends, without really benefitting the object of his misapplied kindness."

Writing in 1831 to George Dyer, who had been a Grecian when Lamb was a child, Lamb recalls his old state as a Deputy: "You ever wrote what I call a Grecian's hand; what the Grecians write (or used) at Christ's Hospital; such as Whalley would have admired, and Boyer have applauded, but Smith or Atwood (writing-masters) would have horsed you for. Your boy-of-genius hand and your mercantile hand are various. By your flourishes, I should think you never learned to make eagles or corkscrews, or flourish the governors' names in the writing-school; and by the tenor and cut of your letters I suspect you were never in it at all. . . . Mine is a sort of deputy Grecian's hand; a little better, and more of a worldly hand, than a Grecian's, but still remote from the mercantile. I don't know how it is, but I keep my rank in fancy still since school-days. I can never forget I was a deputy Grecian! And writing to you, or to Coleridge, besides affection, I feel a reverential deference as to Grecians still. I keep my soaring way above the Great Erasmians, yet far beneath the other. Alas! what am I now? what is a Leadenhall clerk or India pensioner to a deputy Grecian? How art thou fallen, O Lucifer!"

Here I quote Leigh Hunt again: "'But what is a Deputy Grecian?' Ah, reader! to ask that question, and at the same time to know anything at all worth knowing, would at one time, according to our notion of things, have been impossible. When I entered the school, I was shown three gigantic boys, young men rather (for the eldest was between seventeen and eighteen),



who, I was told, were going to the University. These were the Grecians. They were the three head boys of the Grammar School, and were understood to have their destiny fixed for the Church. The next class to these, like a College of Cardinals to those three Popes (for every Grecian was in our eyes infallible), were the Deputy Grecians. The former were supposed to have completed their Greek studies, and were deep in Sophocles and Euripides. The latter were thought equally competent to tell you anything respecting Homer and Demosthenes. These two classes, and the head boys of the Navigation School, held a certain rank over the whole place, both in school and out."

To return to Boyer. In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge wrote well of the terrible J. B., whom he always calls, inaccurately, Bowyer. "At School (Christ's Hospital), I enjoyed the inestimable advantage of a very sensible, though at the same time a very severe master, the Reverend James Bowyer. He early moulded my taste to the preference of Demosthenes to Cicero, of Homer and Theocritus to Virgil, and again of Virgil to Ovid. He habituated me to compare Lucretius (in such extracts as I then read), Terence, and, above all, the chaster poems of Catullus, not only with the Roman poets of the so-called silver and brazen ages, but with even those of the Augustan æra: and on grounds of plain sense and universal logic to see and assert the superiority of the former in the truth and nativeness both of their thoughts and diction.

"At the same time that we were studying the Greek tragic poets, he made us read Shakespeare and Milton as lessons: and they were the lessons, too, which required most time and trouble to *bring up*, so as to escape his censure. I learned from him that poetry, even that of the loftiest and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive, causes. In the truly great poets, he would say, there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word; and I well remember that, availing himself of the synonymes to the Homer of Didymus, he made us attempt to show, with regard to each, why it would not have answered the same purpose; and wherein consisted the peculiar fitness of the word in the original text.

"In our own English compositions (at least for the last three



years of our school education,) he showed no mercy to phrase, metaphor, or image, unsupported by a sound sense, or where the same sense might have been conveyed with equal force and dignity in plainer words. *Lute, harp, and lyre, Muse, Muses, and inspirations, Pegasus, Parnassus and Hippocrene*, were all an abomination to him. In fancy I can almost hear him now exclaiming, ‘Harp? Harp? Lyre? Pen and ink, boy, you mean! Muse, boy, Muse? Your nurse’s daughter, you mean! Pierian spring? Oh aye! the cloister-pump, I suppose!’”

In the *Table Talk* Coleridge gives us another glimpse of this beneficent tyrant. “‘Boy!’ I remember Bowyer saying to me once when I was crying the first day of my return after the holidays, ‘Boy! the school is your father! Boy! the school is your mother! Boy! the school is your brother! the school is your sister! the school is your first cousin, and your second-cousin, and all the rest of your relations! Let’s have no more crying!’”

“No tongue,” Coleridge also says, “can express good Mrs. Bowyer. Val. Le Grice and I were going to be flogged for some domestic misdeeds, and Bowyer was thundering away at us by way of prologue, when Mrs. B. looked in, and said, ‘Flog them soundly, sir, I beg!’ This saved us. Bowyer was so nettled at the interruption that he growled out, ‘Away, woman! away!’ and we were let off.”

Writing to Coleridge in 1814, Lamb says, “Old Jimmy Boyer is dead at last. Trollope has got his living, worth £1000 a-year net. See, thou sluggard, thou heretic-sluggard, what mightest thou not have arrived at! Lay thy animosity against Jimmy in the grave. Do not *entail* it on thy posterity”—a pleasantry in the manner of S. T. C.’s own, quoted above.

Leigh Hunt again helps to fill in the picture: “The other master, the upper one, Boyer—famous for the mention of him by Coleridge and Lamb—was a short stout man, inclining to punchiness, with large face and hands, an aquiline nose, long upper lip, and a sharp mouth. His eye was close and cruel. The spectacles which he wore threw a balm over it. Being a clergyman, he dressed in black, with a powdered wig. His clothes were cut short; his hands hung out of the sleeves, with tight wristbands, as if ready for execution; and as he generally wore gray worsted stockings, very tight, with a little balustrade

leg, his whole appearance presented something formidably succinct, hard, and mechanical. In fact, his weak side, and undoubtedly his natural destination, lay in carpentry; and he accordingly carried, in a side-pocket made on purpose, a carpenter's rule. . . .

“One anecdote of his injustice will suffice for all. It is of ludicrous enormity; nor do I believe anything more flagrantly wilful was ever done by himself. I heard Mr. C., the sufferer, now a most respectable person in a Government office, relate it with a due relish, long after quitting the school. The master was in the habit of ‘spiting’ C.; that is to say, of taking every opportunity to be severe with him; nobody knew why. One day he comes into the school, and finds him placed in the middle of it with three other boys. He was not in one of his worst humours, and did not seem inclined to punish them, till he saw his antagonist. ‘Oh, oh! sir,’ said he, ‘what! you are among them, are you?’ and gave him an exclusive thump on the face. He then turned to one of the Grecians, and said, ‘I have not time to flog all these boys; make them draw lots, and I’ll punish one.’ The lots were drawn, and C.’s was favourable. ‘Oh, oh!’ returned the master, when he saw them, ‘you have escaped, have you, sir?’ and pulling out his watch, and turning again to the Grecian, observed, that he found he *had* time to punish the whole three; ‘and, sir,’ added he to C., with another slap, ‘I’ll begin with *you*.’ He then took the boy into the library and flogged him; and, on issuing forth again, had the face to say, with an air of indifference, ‘I have not time, after all, to punish these two other boys; let them take care how they provoke me another time.’ . . .

“Sometimes, however, our despot got into a dilemma, and then he did not know how to get out of it. A boy, now and then, would be roused into open and fierce remonstrance. I recollect S., afterwards one of the mildest of preachers, starting up in his place, and pouring forth on his astonished hearer a torrent of invectives and threats, which the other could only answer by looking pale, and uttering a few threats in return. Nothing came of it. He did not like such matters to go before the governors. Another time, Favell, a Grecian, a youth of high spirit, whom he had struck, went to the school-door, opened it, and, turning round with the handle in his grasp, told him he

would never set foot again in the place, unless he promised to treat him with more delicacy. 'Come back, child; come back!' said the other, pale, and in a faint voice. There was a dead silence. Favell came back, and nothing more was done."

After Lamb himself, it is to Charles Valentine Le Grice, who wrote some reminiscences of him for Talfourd, that we must go for our knowledge of him in his blue coat. "Lamb," he says, "was an amiable gentle boy, very sensible and keenly observing, indulged by his schoolfellows and by his master on account of his infirmity of speech. His countenance was mild; his complexion clear brown, with an expression which might lead you to think that he was of Jewish descent. His eyes were not each of the same colour, one was hazel, the other had specks of grey in the iris, mingled as we see red spots in the blood-stone. His step was plantigrade, which made his walk slow and peculiar, adding to the staid appearance of his figure. I never heard his name mentioned without the addition of Charles, although, as there was no other boy of the name of Lamb, the addition was unnecessary; but there was an implied kindness in it, and it was a proof that his gentle manners excited that kindness.

"His delicate frame and his difficulty of utterance, which was increased by agitation, unfitted him for joining in any boisterous sport. The description which he gives, in his 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital,' of the habits and feelings of the school-boy, is a true one in general, but is more particularly a delineation of himself—the feelings were all in his own heart—the portrait was his own: 'While others were all fire and play, he stole along with all the self-concentration of a young monk.' These habits and feelings were awakened and cherished in him by peculiar circumstances: he had been born and bred in the Inner Temple; and his parents continued to reside there while he was at school, so that he passed from cloister to cloister, and this was all the change his young mind ever knew. On every half-holiday (and there were two in the week) in ten minutes he was in the gardens, on the terrace, or at the fountain of the Temple: here was his home, here his recreation; and the influence they had on his infant mind is vividly shown in his description of the Old Benchers."

So much for the little Charles Lamb outwardly. We have a



glimpse of him within in the *Elia* essay "New Year's Eve," where, nearly forty years afterwards, he thus recalled the spiritual side of his boyhood. "For the child *Elia*—that 'other me,' there, in the back-ground—I must take leave to cherish the remembrance of that young master—with as little reference, I protest, to this stupid changeling of five-and-forty, as if it had been a child of some other house, and not of my parents. . . . I can lay its poor fevered head upon the sick pillow at Christ's, and wake with it in surprise at the gentle posture of maternal tenderness hanging over it, that unknown had watched its sleep. I know how it shrank from any the least colour of falsehood. . . . I know how honest, how courageous (for a weakling) it was—how religious, how imaginative, how hopeful!"

Chief among Lamb's schoolfellows, both in interest and friendliness to himself, was Coleridge. Writing in 1820, Lamb says, in a passage that must have brought tears to the eyes of his friend: "Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the day-spring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not yet turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Logician, Metaphysician, Bard!—How have I seen the casual passer through the Cloisters stand still, intranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the *speech* and the *garb* of the young *Mirandula*), to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of *Jamblichus*, or *Plotinus* (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting *Homer* in his Greek, or *Pindar*—while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity-boy!*" Of Coleridge we shall see so much in the pages that follow—his life being for a while so closely associated with Lamb's—that there is no need to say more here.

Next to Coleridge, *Valentine Le Grice* must have been most congenial to Lamb on the intellectual side. We may gather this from *Le Grice's* writings, brief as they are; from his addiction to fun and punning; and from Lamb's occasional mention in the essays and letters. "Many," says Lamb, also in the *Elia* essay on *Christ's Hospital*, "were the 'wit-combats,' (to dally awhile with the words of old *Fuller*,) between him [*Coleridge*] and *C. V. Le G*—, 'which two I behold like a Spanish great



galleon, and an English man of war; Master Coleridge, like the former, was built far higher in learning, solid, but slow in his performances. C. V. L., with the English man of war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.'” We are given another glimpse of Le Grice in the essay “Grace before Meat”: “I do not quite approve of the epigrammatic conciseness with which that equivocal wag (but my pleasant school-fellow) C. V. L., when importuned for a grace, used to inquire, first slyly leering down the table, ‘Is there no clergyman here?’—significantly adding, ‘Thank G——.’”

There is in Henry Gunning’s *Reminiscences of Cambridge* a story of Le Grice which is quite in the spirit of Lamb himself: “During the Vice-Chancellorship of Dr. Yates, a circumstance occurred which, had it not been for the extreme good nature of the Vice-Chancellor, might have been attended with very unpleasant consequences to the principal actor in it. In order that the matter may be understood, it is necessary to say a few words respecting the figure of the Vice-Chancellor. He was low in stature, remarkably fat, his form was spherical, and his legs extremely short and thick: he appeared to a person following him not very unlike a turtle walking on his hind legs. I was accompanying him to St. Mary’s on a Saint’s day, when I heard the sound of a very jovial party breakfasting on King’s Parade. One of them looking out of the window saw us approach; and before we got opposite the house, they all joined in a very loud and noisy song, of which the following words could be very distinctly heard:—

‘Gadzoons! gadzoons!  
Lowther Yates in pantaloons!’

“These words were often repeated. The Vice-Chancellor directed me to cross the street; and on Mrs. Perry coming to the door, he demanded to see the lodger who was giving the entertainment. Charles Valentine Le Grice, of Trinity, made his appearance. The Vice-Chancellor, highly excited, asked what he meant by insulting him; to this he replied that there was not the most distant idea of insulting him, but that as they were singing, *somehow or other* his name slipped into the song.”

By Gunning's advice Le Grice later apologised to the Vice-Chancellor, who said, "If I were to forgive you, Sir, the story would be all over the University before the evening." "True," replied Le Grice, "but the story of your clemency would accompany it wherever it went!" "The kind-hearted old man forgave him."

Crabb Robinson records in his *Diary* two stories of Le Grice, told him by Lamb, both in reference to a Debating Society which they attended together—possibly in the school, but more probably a London society, like the Cogers', during Le Grice's vacations. On one occasion he began a speech by remarking genially, "The last time I had the pleasure of addressing the Chair in this Hall, I was kicked out of the room." At another time the question before the meeting was, "Who was the greatest orator—Pitt, Fox, or Burke?" Le Grice was equal to it: "I heard a lady, to the question, 'Which do you like best—Beef, veal, or mutton,' say 'Pork.' So I, in reply to your question, answer *Sheridan*."

In Le Grice's career the promise of his youth was in no way fulfilled. His father was a clergyman at Bury St. Edmunds. Born in 1773, Le Grice was just two years older than Lamb. On leaving Christ's Hospital as Senior Grecian, he passed to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he wrote one or two clever and original squibs. In 1796, as we learn in Lamb's first letter to Coleridge, he became tutor to the son of a wealthy widow in Cornwall—Mrs. William Nicholls of Tereife; in 1798 he was ordained; in 1799 he married Mrs. Nicholls and became a wealthy man. Young Nicholls died in 1815, Mrs. Le Grice died in 1821, and Le Grice inherited all the property, and lived on the Tereife estate until 1858. His only enduring work is his translation of Longus, published in 1803.

Lord Courtney, who was born and bred in the neighbourhood of Tereife and remembers Le Grice well, describes him in a letter to me as "a jocund rubicund little man much of Charles Lamb's height but plumper, full of puns and jokes, very genial, and in quality rather suggestive of one of Peacock's divines than of a man 'steeped in theological rancour,' such as you describe." This was one of the errors of my first edition—a fortunate one, I now think, since it called forth so interesting a testimony on the other side. Lord Courtney adds, "Perhaps I may be forgiven

for the slight personal illustration if I recall how, in 1855, on my taking my degree at Cambridge, my father told me that Mr. Le Grice had come rushing up to him full of enthusiasm at my success. I mention this little trait with much hesitation, but it was very characteristic."

As a boy at school, Le Grice spent some of his holidays at the Lambs', and Lamb and he seem to have forgathered after, especially between his leaving Cambridge and departing for Cornwall in 1796; but after this they did not meet until 1834, when they dined together at the Bell at Edmonton. In May 1838 Le Grice contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine* some reminiscences of Coleridge and Lamb, containing the following admirable criticism of Lamb's humour: "With him the natural passions had room to play; and his wit, flashing out of his melancholy, was as the summer lightning playing innocuously round the very cloud which gave it birth. And thus it is the overburdened spirit relieves itself: a pun may discharge a whole load of sorrow; the sharp point of a quibble or a joke may let out the long-gathered waters of bitterness. We want no Hamlets to teach us this. We need no *Sternes* to tell us how thoughts and imaginings, pensive and jocose, alternate and play across each other and intermingle in the mind. This was Lamb's wit—it kept apart by itself. It did not sharpen the arrows of satire, it did not grin with a provoking malice, it did not thirst for reward, it did not cater to vanity, it did not live on adulation. It was his own quiet possession and delight. It had no fellowship with the Footes, the Sheridans, the Colmans of the day. It rose higher, as it sprang from a greater depth than theirs; but it held acquaintance with—it paid a becoming deference to the wits and wise men of old. It shook Master Shallow by the hand: it pulled off its cap in the presence of Sir Thomas Browne; helped old Fuller to his great arm-chair; eat a pippin and carraways with Mr. Justice Shallow in his garden; walked arm-in-arm between Bunyan and Bishop Patrick; loved the old playwrights dearly, and the name of Bankside; would converse with Jewell and Fox and the primitive quakers; read Homer in Chapman and not in Pope; would be seen bending gracefully on knee to the Duchess of Newcastle, like a page in one of Vandyck's pictures; and everywhere it smacked rarely of antiquity; and had an



equal command over our tears and smiles. Being thus, it will endure." It is a pity that the man who could write with such discernment as this should have done so little.

In his *Elia* essay on Christ's Hospital Lamb has told us much of his old schoolfellows. Leigh Hunt, in his *Autobiography*, again supplements certain of his descriptions. Thus of poor Samuel Le Grice, Valentine's brother, whom Lamb calls "sanguine, volatile and sweet natured," Leigh Hunt remarks: "He was the maddest of all the great boys in my time; clever, full of address, and not hampered with modesty. Remote rumours, not lightly to be heard, fell on our ears, respecting pranks of his amongst the nurses' daughters. He had a fair handsome face, with delicate aquiline nose, and twinkling eyes. I remember his astonishing me when I was 'a new boy,' with sending me for a bottle of water, which he proceeded to pour down the back of G., a grave Deputy Grecian. On the master asking him one day why he, of all the boys, had given up no exercise (it was a particular exercise that they were bound to do in the course of a long set of holidays), he said he had had 'a lethargy.' The extreme impudence of this puzzled the master; and, I believe, nothing came of it. . . .

"Le Grice was in the habit of eating apples in school-time, for which he had been often rebuked. One day, having particularly pleased the master, the latter, who was eating apples himself, and who would now and then with great ostentation present a boy with some halfpenny token of his mansuetude, called out to his favourite of the moment, 'Le Grice, here is an apple for you.' Le Grice, who felt his dignity hurt as a Grecian, but was more pleased at having this opportunity of mortifying his reprover, replied, with an exquisite tranquillity of assurance, 'Sir, I never eat apples.' For this, among other things, the boys adored him. Poor fellow! He and Favell (who, though very generous, was said to be a little too sensible of an humble origin) wrote to the Duke of York, when they were at College, for commissions in the army. The Duke good-naturedly sent them. Le Grice died in the West Indies. Favell was killed in one of the battles in Spain, but not before he had distinguished himself as an officer and a gentleman."

Of Favell Lamb writes in two places. In the Christ's Hospital essay he calls him, "dogged, faithful, anticipative of insult,



warm-hearted, with something of the old Roman height about him." And again in "Poor Relations" under feigned conditions he again describes his sensitiveness. Both Sam Le Grice and Favell decided to throw in their lot with Coleridge, Southey, Lovell, Burnett and any other enthusiasts there might be, in the great scheme of Pantisocracy. Favell was even moved to poetry on the subject.

We find Bob Allen also both in Lamb and in Leigh Hunt. In the Christ's Hospital essay it is written: "Nor shalt thou, their compeer, be quickly forgotten, Allen, with the cordial smile, and still more cordial laugh, with which thou wert wont to make the old Cloisters shake, in thy cognition of some poignant jest of theirs; or the anticipation of some more material, and, peradventure, practical one, of thine own. Extinct are those smiles, with that beautiful countenance, with which (for thou wert the *Nireus formosus* of the school), in the days of thy maturer waggery, thou didst disarm the wrath of infuriated town-damsel, who, incensed by provoking pinch, turning tigress-like round, suddenly converted by thy angel-look, exchanged the half-formed terrible 'bl——,' for a gentler greeting—'bless thy handsome face!'" Leigh Hunt tells the same story.

Allen's career was a varied one. He was born in 1772, and was thus between two and three years older than Lamb. On leaving school as a Grecian he went to University College, Oxford, where, in his rooms, Coleridge first met Southey, in 1794. Another of his friends at this time was John Stoddart, afterwards Hazlitt's brother-in-law, destined also to have association with Lamb. It is possible also that Lamb's first acquaintance with William Godwin was due to Allen, for in 1796 we find him telling Coleridge that Stoddart and Godwin are influencing Allen so undesirably that he has become a sceptic. Allen married a widow with daughters as old as himself, a match which Lamb deplored. In 1796, however, the widow died, and in the next year Allen was appointed Deputy Surgeon to the Second Royals, in Portugal. In 1802 he was with Stoddart at the Lakes and in Scotland, by which time he was probably free of his army duties. Later we know from Lamb that he was a journalist. In the *Elia* essay on "Newspapers" is this amusing passage: "While we were wringing out coy sprightlinesses for the Post [in 1802-03], and writhing under the

toil of what is called 'easy writing,' Bob Allen, our *quondam* schoolfellow, was tapping his impracticable brains in a like service for the 'Oracle.' Not that Robert troubled himself much about wit. If his paragraphs had a sprightly air about them, it was sufficient. He carried this nonchalance so far at last, that a matter of intelligence, and that no very important one, was not seldom palmed upon his employers for a good jest; for example sake—'*Walking yesterday morning casually down Snow Hill, who should we meet but Mr. Deputy Humphreys! we rejoice to add, that the worthy Deputy appeared to enjoy a good state of health. We do not remember ever to have seen him look better.*' This gentleman, so surprisingly met upon Snow Hill, from some peculiarities in gait or gesture, was a constant butt for mirth to the small paragraph-mongers of the day; and our friend thought that he might have his fling at him with the rest. We met A. in Holborn shortly after this extraordinary rencounter, which he told with tears of satisfaction in his eyes, and chuckling at the anticipated effects of its announcement next day in the paper. We did not quite comprehend where the wit of it lay at the time; nor was it easy to be detected, when the thing came out, advantaged by type and letter-press. He had better have met any thing that morning than a Common Council Man. His services were shortly after dispensed with, on the plea that his paragraphs of late had been deficient in point. The one in question, it must be owned, had an air, in the opening especially, proper to awaken curiosity; and the sentiment, or moral, wears the aspect of humanity, and good neighbourly feeling. But somehow the conclusion was not judged altogether to answer to the magnificent promise of the premises.

"We traced our friend's pen afterwards in the 'True Briton,' the 'Star,' the 'Traveller,'—from all which he was successively dismissed, the Proprietors having 'no further occasion for his services.' Nothing was easier than to detect him. When wit failed, or topics ran low, there constantly appeared the following—'*It is not generally known that the three Blue Balls at the Pawnbrokers' shops are the ancient arms of Lombardy. The Lombards were the first money-brokers in Europe.*' Bob has done more to set the public right on this important point of blazonry, than the whole College of Heralds."

Allen died of apoplexy in 1805. By virtue of this brief passage in his schoolfellow's essay his immortality is secure.

Among the schoolfellows mentioned by Lamb with whom he probably had no intercourse in after years, and very little when at Christ's Hospital, was Thomas Fanshawe Middleton, first Bishop of Calcutta, who is commemorated at the school to day, with Lamb and Coleridge, by a statuette called the Coleridge Memorial, which is held (like an athletic trophy) by the Ward that has gained most prizes during the year. The memorial illustrates the story of Middleton, then a Deputy Grecian, finding Coleridge one day reading Virgil in the playground, and on asking if it were a task, receiving the reply that it was a pleasure. Middleton told Boyer, and the incident was the beginning of Boyer's interest in Coleridge.

Other schoolfellows of Lamb who cannot have been much more than names to him, were Lancelot Pepys Stevens, afterwards a famous grammar master at the school; Sir Edward Thornton the diplomatist; and George Richards, the author of several volumes of poetry, who in 1791 won Earl Harcourt's prize for a poem on the aboriginal Britons.

To-day Christ's Hospital is no more. New buildings stand on its site, and the boys are taught in the Sussex weald. The memory of Lamb and Coleridge will, however, always be kept sweet in the school. Pride in such scholars would persist under any changes, without the tangible support that is given by the Coleridge Memorial, or the Lamb medals, struck in 1875 on the centenary of Lamb's birth, one of which is awarded every year to the writer of the best English essay. Two of the new school-houses at Horsham are called after Lamb.

A little while ago I heard a story which illustrates the affectionate regard in which Lamb's name is held. A blue-coat boy, walking through a residential street in London, was astonished to hear himself hailed by a strange, bareheaded, elderly gentleman standing on a doorstep. "Come here, boy," he cried, "come here;" and when the boy reached him he pressed a five-shilling piece in his hand, with the words, "In memory of Charles Lamb."



## CHAPTER VI

## JOSEPH PAICE AND ALICE W—

1790-1794

Thomas Coventry—Joseph Paice—Lamb at 27 Bread Street Hill—The South-Sea House—The Odd Fishes' Influence—Samuel Salt's Death—7 Little Queen Street—The Early Spring of 1792 and Alice W— —The East India House—"Mr. Guy"—Lamb as a Playgoer.

LAMB left Christ's Hospital on November 23rd, 1789, aged nearly fifteen. The next date in his life of which we have certain knowledge is September 1st, 1791, when his term at the South-Sea House probably began. A chapter in a book called *Family Pictures* by Miss Anne Manning (better known as the author of *Mary Powell*) helps us to fill in the interim; but first it is necessary to glance at another of the Lambs' friends, or at any rate patrons, in the Temple—Thomas Coventry—because according to Miss Manning it was to this old and crusted lawyer, one of Samuel Salt's associates, and with him a Governor of Christ's Hospital, that Charles Lamb in part owed his first employment. He is thus described in *Elia*: "Thomas Coventry was a cadet of the noble family of that name. He passed his youth in contracted circumstances, which gave him early those parsimonious habits which in after-life never forsook him; so that, with one windfall or another, about the time I knew him, he was master of four or five hundred thousand pounds; nor did he look, or walk, worth a moidore less. He lived in a gloomy house opposite the pump in Serjeant's-inn, Fleet-street. . . . C. had an agreeable seat at North Cray, where he seldom spent above a day or two at a time in the summer; but preferred, during the hot months, standing at his window in this damp, close, well-like mansion, to watch, as he said, 'the maids drawing water all day long.' I suspect he had his within-door reasons for the preference.



*Hic currus et arma fuere.* He might think his treasures more safe. His house had the aspect of a strong box.

“C. was a close hunk—a hoarder rather than a miser—or, if a miser, none of the mad Elwes breed, who have brought discredit upon a character, which cannot exist without certain admirable points of steadiness and unity of purpose. One may hate a true miser, but cannot, I suspect, so easily despise him. By taking care of the pence, he is often enabled to part with the pounds, upon a scale that leaves us careless generous fellows halting at an immeasurable distance behind. C. gave away 30,000*l.* at once in his life-time to a blind charity. His housekeeping was severely looked after, but he kept the table of a gentleman. He would know who came in and who went out of his house, but his kitchen chimney was never suffered to freeze.”

Of Coventry in the Temple, where the little boy would often have seen him, there is a masterly and vivid description. His person, says Elia, “was a quadrate, his step massy and elephantine, his face square as the lion’s, his gait peremptory and path-keeping, indivertible from his way as a moving column, the scarecrow of his inferiors, the brow-beater of equals and superiors, who made a solitude of children wherever he came, for they fled his insufferable presence, as they would have shunned an Elisha bear. His growl was as thunder in their ears, whether he spake to them in mirth or in rebuke, his invitatory notes being, indeed, of all, the most repulsive and horrid. Clouds of snuff, aggravating the natural terrors of his speech, broke from each majestic nostril, darkening the air. He took it, not by pinches, but a palmful at once, diving for it under the mighty flaps of his old-fashioned waistcoat pocket; his waistcoat red and angry, his coat dark rappee, tintured by dye original, and by adjuncts, with buttons of obsolete gold. And so he paced the terrace.”

Among Coventry’s friends was a city merchant named Joseph Paice; and one day, says Miss Manning who had the story more or less directly from Mr. Paice, “one day Mr. Coventry said to Mr. Paice, ‘There is a lad whom I placed some years since in the Blue Coat School, now on the point of leaving it, and I know not what on earth to do with him.’ ‘Let him have the run of my counting-house till something better offers,’ said Mr. Paice; and accordingly Charles Lamb took his place there, and continued in it till he obtained a clerkship in the

South-Sea House, of which company Mr. Coventry was governor, and Mr. Paice one of the directors." It is, as I have said above, more probable that Samuel Salt, rather than Thomas Coventry, was Lamb's sponsor at Christ's Hospital; but we may take the conversation to be true in substance, even if Miss Manning, who received her information orally, has a faulty detail here and there.

That Lamb was in Paice's office at 27 Bread Street Hill for some time we may feel certain, and it was there that he acquired the knowledge of that gentleman which in after years he recorded, in the essay on "Modern Gallantry," in words that will keep Paice's memory sweet and green for many generations. It is interesting and significant to reflect that the observation on which the character sketch is based was that of a boy of fifteen.

"Joseph Paice, of Bread-street-hill, merchant, and one of the Directors of the South-Sea company—the same to whom Edwards, the Shakspeare commentator, has addressed a fine sonnet—was the only pattern of consistent gallantry I have met with. He took me under his shelter at an early age, and bestowed some pains upon me. I owe to his precepts and example whatever there is of the man of business (and that is not much) in my composition. It was not his fault that I did not profit more. Though bred a Presbyterian, and brought up a merchant, he was the finest gentleman of his time. He had not *one* system of attention to females in the drawing-room, and *another* in the shop, or at the stall. I do not mean that he made no distinction. But he never lost sight of sex, or overlooked it in the casualties of a disadvantageous situation. I have seen him stand bare-headed—smile if you please—to a poor servant girl, while she has been inquiring of him the way to some street—in such a posture of unforced civility, as neither to embarrass her in the acceptance, nor himself in the offer, of it. He was no dangler, in the common acceptation of the word, after women: but he revered and upheld, in every form in which it came before him, *womanhood*. I have seen him—nay, smile not—tenderly escorting a market-woman, whom he had encountered in a shower, exalting his umbrella over her poor basket of fruit, that it might receive no damage, with as much carefulness as if she had been a



JOSEPH PAICE.





Countess. To the reverend form of Female Eld he would yield the wall (though it were to an ancient beggar-woman) with more ceremony than we can afford to show our grandams. He was the Preux Chevalier of Age; the Sir Calidore, or Sir Tristan, to those who have no Calidores or Tristans to defend them. The roses, that had long faded thence, still bloomed for him in those withered and yellow cheeks." Of this courtly Christian gentleman, who died in 1810, much more may be read in Miss Manning's volume. I wish I could transfer some of her description to these pages, but it must not be.

We have no knowledge as to the length of Lamb's engagement in Mr. Paice's office. It may have covered the whole period between school and the South-Sea House, and it may have left him with time to kill either at home or at Blakesware; but on September 1st, 1791, when he was sixteen and a half, his career at the South-Sea House began—a sojourn which, though of very brief duration, was destined thirty years later to give the keynote to the Essays of Elia and provide the essayist with his pseudonym.

In the Albert Museum at Exeter is preserved the following document:—

Recd 8th feby. 1792 of the Honble South Sea Company by the hands of their Secretary Twelve pounds 1s. 6d. for 23 weeks attendance in the Examiners Office

£12 : 1 : 6

CHAS. LAMB.

This tells us that Lamb's work was in the Examiner's office, very possibly under the eye of his brother John, whose whole life was spent in the Company's service; that he had entered the office on September 1st, 1791; and that his salary was half a guinea a week.

When, in 1820, at the age of forty-five, Lamb was invited to contribute essays to the newly established *London Magazine*, he began his famous series with a paper of recollections of the clerks whom he saw about him during these five months. The portraiture is intensely vivid and is fortified by a number of minute details that must, I think, have been acquired later, either from information supplied by Lamb's brother, who was subsequently to rise to the height of Accountant, with a suite of rooms in the building, or from observations made at John Lamb's evening parties. If, however, I am mistaken, and Lamb wrote,

at the age of forty-five, the South-Sea essay entirely from impressions gathered when he was sixteen, it is one of the most remarkable feats in literature of what might be called imaginative memory.

Lamb's five months' sojourn among this curious little band of men was probably not without its influence on his character. "They were," he says of the clerks, "mostly bachelors. Generally (for they had not much to do) persons of a curious and speculative turn of mind. Old-fashioned, for a reason mentioned before. Humorists, for they were of all descriptions; and, not having been brought together in early life (which has a tendency to assimilate the members of corporate bodies to each other), but, for the most part, placed in this house in ripe or middle age, they necessarily carried into it their separate habits and oddities, unqualified, if I may so speak, as into a common stock. Hence they formed a sort of Noah's ark. Odd fishes. A lay-monastery. Domestic retainers in a great house, kept more for show than use. Yet pleasant fellows, full of chat—and not a few among them had arrived at considerable proficiency on the German flute."

Charles Lamb's mind was fairly well developed from the first, and would probably have been much the same throughout his life whatever his experiences had been; but I think that we may thank the South-Sea House for a little of his precious whimsicality and quaint humour. So impressionable and appreciative a student of humanity could not, at the age of sixteen, have lived among these odd fishes without borrowing a little from them, or at any rate gaining the courage of idiosyncrasy.

We have seen that Lamb left the South-Sea House on February 8th, 1792—at least we may suppose from so unusual a date for settling an account that his engagement then terminated. My impression is that he was called home in order to help his family in the confusion that had come upon them by the death of Samuel Salt, which occurred in that month. Mr. Salt's thoughtfulness for his old companions showed itself in his will, dated 1786. To his servant John Lamb, "who has lived with me near forty years," he left £500 South-Sea Stock, and by a codicil in 1787 he directed also that his exchequer annuities of £210 and £14 should be received by John Lamb, who should be paid by the executors £10 a year for his trouble. To Mrs. Lamb he left two sums of £100 each, one of which was "well

deserved for her care and attention during my illness"—not his last illness, but one previous to making the will in 1786.

What savings the Lambs had, or whether their income was augmented by any contribution from John Lamb the younger, we do not know. All that we know with certainty is that Mary Lamb soon after this time was occupied as a mantua-maker. The family probably very soon left the Temple. Whether they moved immediately to Little Queen Street, the first new home of which we have any knowledge, I have not discovered, but in 1794 they were at No. 7 in that thoroughfare, which used to run south from High Holborn (by the Holborn Restaurant), and is now merged in Kingsway. Horwood's map of London in 1799 shows the exact site of No. 7. It is probable that part of Holy Trinity Church covers the site, though I fancy that the verger of that temple is inaccurate in his statement that the felled tree stump, which he displays, grew in the Lambs' garden. That the Lambs lived at Little Queen Street as early as 1794, two years before the earliest of Charles Lamb's letters, I know on the evidence of Mr. Carey Foster, who tells me that his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Weight, who had been married in 1788, occupied rooms in Little Queen Street, in the same house as the Lambs, some time before settling in Manchester in 1794. The tradition in the family is that the Lambs shared the house with the Weights, but the reverse may be the case. The only personal recollection that has come down is of Miss Lamb, "who was a dressmaker," remarking one day that she should like to be permitted to "improve Mrs. Weight's caps."

To come back to Lamb, whom we left on February 8th, 1792, laying down his pen in the Examiner's office at the South-Sea House for the last time and returning home with his earnings. Whether or not he had heard of the opening for him at the East India House, I cannot say; but he did not enter that Company's employ until April 5th, three months later. To this we come shortly. At the present moment there is a more romantic topic for consideration, for my impression is that Lamb filled part at least of the interval by visiting his grandmother, and at the same time began to cherish affection for the girl whom he afterwards called Alice W——, but who is thought to have been Ann Simmons of Blenheims, near Blakesware. My reasons for believing this to be the case are, (1) that on April 5th, 1792,



he passed into harness from which he never escaped, except for annual holidays—at first, probably, very brief ones—or single days when he could not have reached Widford; and (2) that Mrs. Field died in August, 1792, thus closing Blakesware to her grandchildren. We have no knowledge of any other friends with whom Lamb could have stayed after her death, while it is hardly likely that so young a clerk could have afforded to stay at Mr. Clemitson's inn at Widford, except very occasionally.

The full story of Lamb's young passion belongs to a later chapter, but the early months of 1792 I believe to be the time of its birth. Lamb was seventeen in that year, two days after he left the South-Sea House.

It has been stated that Lamb owed his nomination to the East India House to Samuel Salt, but Miss Manning records that Joseph Paice was again the benefactor, with the co-operation of Sir Francis Baring, then Chairman of the East India Company. This may well be the case, particularly as Samuel Salt had died two months before Lamb took up his new appointment; which he did on April 5th, 1792, passing at once into the Accountant's department, where he was destined to remain for three and thirty years. Every member of this department had to enter into a bond of £500, and to find two friends willing to do the same, as a security of good behaviour. Lamb's bondsmen were Peter Peirson, Esquire, one of his Old Benchers of the Inner Temple and a friend of Samuel Salt, and John Lamb of the Inner Temple, Gentleman, this being John Lamb the younger. It may be added here that when Peter Peirson died his place was taken by James White (of the *Falstaff Letters*, to whom we shall presently come); when White died his place was taken by Martin Charles Burney; and when John Lamb died his place was taken by John Stoddart. Not until a clerk had served his three probationary years was any salary given to him. Lamb, therefore, was not in the receipt of money until April, 1795, when he began to earn £40 a year. The next year it rose to £70.

The age of John Lamb the elder I have not discovered, but he cannot at this time have been far from seventy; and there are suggestions that his health began to break almost at once after Samuel Salt's death. We have no information of the history of



the family for at least three years: the latter half of 1792, all 1793 and the greater part of 1794 are a blank. Two glimpses of Charles Lamb we have, however, in this period, Leigh Hunt providing one and Valentine Le Grice the other. Leigh Hunt, who was destined to know Lamb well, first saw him on a visit to his old school, probably some time in 1792-94, when Hunt was a small Christ's Hospitaller. He writes in his *Autobiography*: "Lamb I recollect coming to see the boys, with a pensive, brown, handsome, and kindly face, and a gait advancing with a motion from side to side, between involuntary consciousness and attempted ease. His brown complexion may have been owing to a visit to the country; his air of uneasiness to a great burden of sorrow. He dressed with a quaker-like plainness. I did not know him as Lamb; I took him for a Mr. 'Guy,' having heard somebody address him by that appellation, I suppose in jest."

The origin of the Guy joke is explained by Valentine Le Grice in his communication to Talfourd from which I have already quoted: "In the first year of his clerkship Lamb spent the evening of the 5th November with some of his former schoolfellows, who, being amused with the particularly large and flapping brim of his round hat, pinned it up on the sides in the form of a cocked-hat. Lamb made no alteration in it, but walked home in his usual sauntering gait towards the Temple. As he was going down Ludgate-hill, some gay young men, who seemed not to have passed the London Tavern without resting, exclaimed, 'The veritable Guy!—no man of straw!' and with this exclamation they took him up, making a chair with their arms, carried him, seated him on a post in St. Paul's-churchyard, and there left him. This story Lamb told so seriously, that the truth of it was never doubted. He wore his three-cornered hat many evenings, and retained the name of Guy ever after. Like Nym, he quietly sympathised in the fun, and seemed to say, 'that was the humour of it.'

"A clergyman of the City lately wrote to me, 'I have no recollection of Lamb. There was a gentleman called Guy, to whom you once introduced me, and with whom I have occasionally interchanged nods for more than thirty years; but how is it that I never met Mr. Lamb? If I was ever introduced to him, I wonder that we never came in contact during my residence for

ten years in Edmonton.' Imagine this gentleman's surprise when I informed him that his nods to Mr. Guy had been constantly reciprocated by Mr. Lamb!"

In his essay "On Some of the Old Actors," written in 1822 or at the end of 1821, Lamb refers to a playbill of "Twelfth Night" at Drury Lane "two and thirty years ago." Here we have another example of his extraordinary gift of observation and receptivity, for in that year, which would be 1789 or early 1790, he was not quite fifteen, and yet upon his memories of these and other contemporary performances he based his wonderful criticisms—more, reconstructions—of the great actors of that time, and notably of Bensley as Malvolio. I imagine that he became a confirmed playgoer almost from the moment that he left Christ's Hospital. The essays tell us who were his favourite performers—Mrs. Jordan, Munden, Liston (afterwards to be among his evening visitors), Elliston, Mrs. Powel (afterwards Mrs. Renard), Bensley, Dodd, Dicky Suett, the Palmers, Jack Bannister, Miss Farren, Miss Pope, William Parsons, Lovegrove and John Philip Kemble. These were before the days of Miss Kelly, his later divinity.

In the essay "Barbara S——," attributing—but not, I think, seriously—another frustration of destiny to his stammering tongue, Lamb even suggests that he wanted to be an actor himself. "I was always fond of the society of players, and am not sure that an impediment in my speech (which certainly kept me out of the pulpit) even more than certain personal disqualifications, which are often got over in that profession, did not prevent me at one time of life from adopting it."

## CHAPTER VII

## LOVE

1794-1796

Coleridge in London—The Salutation in Newgate Street—Ann Simmons—The Sonnets—Mary Sumner—Charles Lamb, Bachelor—Robert Southey—*Falstaff's Letters*—Jem White.

THE latter part of 1792, all 1793 and the greater part of 1794 are, as I have said, a blank. But in late December, 1794, we see Charles Lamb, now nearly twenty, in what was destined to become a characteristic environment, at the Salutation Tavern, at 17 Newgate Street (almost opposite Christ's Hospital, and now, like that building, destroyed), drinking egg hot, smoking Oronooko, and listening to Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Coleridge, aged twenty-two, in love with Mary Evans, and engaged to Sarah Fricker, having just gone down from Cambridge in term time and abandoned his degree, was now at the Salutation, postponing, as became usual with him, his duty. His duty was to hasten to Bristol and put his relations with Sarah Fricker on a right footing. Instead he was writing sonnets to eminent characters in the *Morning Chronicle*, with Lamb's help in one at least—that addressed to Mrs. Siddons—and settling the affairs of the universe with an eloquence that had forced a previous landlord to the extreme length of offering him free board and lodging if only he would talk and talk. With him, after office hours and far into the night, we find Lamb.

From some lines to Lamb which, in December, 1794, Coleridge sent him with an unfinished poem ("Religious Musings"), we know Mary Lamb to have been recently ill:—

In fancy (well I know)  
From business wandering far and local cares,  
Thou creepest round a dear-loved Sister's bed  
With noiseless step, and watchest the faint look,  
Soothing each pang with fond solicitude,  
And tenderest tones medicinal of love. . . .

Cheerily, dear Charles !  
 Thou thy best friend shalt cherish many a year :  
 Such warm presagings feel I of high Hope.  
 For not uninterested the dear Maid  
 I've viewed—her soul affectionate yet wise,  
 Her polish'd wit as mild as lambent glories  
 That play around a sainted infant's head.

But we may take it practically as certain that Mary Lamb had recovered before the midnight vigils of the Salutation season set in.

Many years later—in 1818—when dedicating to Coleridge the first volume of his *Works*, Lamb wrote of these old nights and what they meant to him : “Some of the Sonnets, which shall be carelessly turned over by the general reader, may happily awaken in you remembrances, which I should be sorry should be ever totally extinct—the memory

‘Of summer days and of delightful years—’

even so far back as to those old suppers at our old \*\*\*\*\* Inn,—when life was fresh, and topics exhaustless,—and you first kindled in me, if not the power, yet the love of poetry, and beauty, and kindliness.—

‘What words have I heard  
 Spoke at the Mermaid!’

Writing to Coleridge in the summer of 1796, eighteen months after the Salutation conferences, Lamb tells us something of his state of mind at the end of 1794. He says : “You came to Town, and I saw you at a time when your heart was yet bleeding with recent wounds. Like yourself, I was sore galled with disappointed Hope. . . . When you left London [in January, 1795, dragged away to Bristol by Southey], I felt a dismal void in my heart, I found myself cut off at one and the same time from two most dear to me.”

This brings us again to “Alice W——,” for the second person indicated was certainly not Southey, but—there is, I think, small room for doubt—Lamb’s Hertfordshire beauty, Ann Simmons, Anna of the sonnets and Alice of the essays ; and Lamb’s reference shows us that the beginning of 1795 marked the final close of their intimacy. Lamb was then nearly twenty. My own feeling, as I have said, is that it was early 1792—Mrs. Field having died in the summer of that year—that saw Lamb’s most serious wooing. Of 1793 we know nothing ; and of 1794 only



that at the end of it Lamb carried to Coleridge tales of "disappointed hope," and that he parted for ever from Anna at the same time as from Coleridge.

That now, in 1796, he still loved her, or loved to dwell tenderly and wistfully upon all that she stood for in his mind, we may believe, remembering that he was only twenty-one, that he was solitary, that he was proposing to be a poet, and that his hero Coleridge had long cherished a grand passion; but I do not fancy that his original boyish fervour ever revived.

Mrs. Field is said to have discouraged the intimacy on the grounds that there was insanity in the Lamb family, of the truth of which statement subsequent years afforded only too much proof. Indeed Lamb himself came to her support, for in his letter to Coleridge of May 27th, 1796, the earliest that has been preserved, he tells him that "the six weeks that finished last year [1795] and began this your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a mad house at Hoxton. . . . Coleridge, it may convince you of my regards for you when I tell you my head ran on you in my madness, as much almost as on another Person, who I am inclined to think was the more immediate cause of my temporary frenzy."<sup>1</sup> By "another person" it is reasonable to suppose that Anna is again meant. The same letter offers further evidence in support of my belief that the more passionate intercourse between Lamb and Anna had long ceased. Lamb writes: "My Sonnets I have extended to the number of nine since I saw you" (in January, 1795). Some of these sonnets may have perished, but of those that remain Anna is the subject; and among them is this, which we know was written prior to early summer 1795, and which belongs to Widford:—

Was it some sweet device of Faery  
That mocked my steps with many a lonely glade,  
And fancied wanderings with a fair-hair'd maid?  
Have these things been? or what rare witchery,  
Impregning with delights the charmed air,  
Enlighted up the semblance of a smile  
In those fine eyes? methought they spake the while  
Soft soothing things, which might enforce despair  
To drop the murdering knife, and let go by

---

<sup>1</sup> One other thing that (on the evidence of Southey) we know of Lamb's temporary frenzy is that he believed himself for a while to be young Norval in Home's "Douglas."

His foul resolve. And does the lonely glade  
 Still court the foot-steps of the fair-hair'd maid?  
 Still in her locks the gales of summer sigh?  
 While I forlorn do wander reckless where,  
 And 'mid my wanderings meet no Anna there.

Writing to Coleridge a little later, Lamb copies out other sonnets. Of the following, he says it was written "early in last summer" (1795) in Hertfordshire, "on revisiting a spot where the scene was laid of my first sonnet [that just quoted] that 'mock'd my steps with many a lonely glade'":—

When last I roved these winding wood walks green,  
 Green winding walks, and pathways shady-sweet,  
 Ofttimes would Anna seek the silent scene,  
 Shrouding her beauties in the lone retreat.  
 No more I hear her footsteps in the shade;  
 Her image only in these pleasant ways  
 Meets me self-wandering where in better days  
 I held free converse with my fair hair'd maid.  
 I pass'd the little cottage, which she loved,  
 The cottage which did once my all contain:  
 It spake of days that ne'er must come again,  
 Spake to my heart and much my heart was moved.  
 "Now fair befall thee, gentle maid," said I,  
 And from the cottage turn'd me, with a sigh.

The same letter contains also the following sonnet, belonging, we may assume, to the same period:—

A timid grace sits trembling in her Eye,  
 As loth to meet the rudeness of men's sight,  
 Yet shedding a delicious lunar light,  
 That steeps in kind oblivious ex'tacy  
 The care-craz'd mind, like some still melody:  
 Speaking most plain the thoughts which do possess  
 Her gentle sprite, peace and meek quietness,  
 And innocent loves, and maiden purity.  
 A look whereof might heal the cruel smart  
 Of changed friends, or fortune's wrongs unkind;  
 Might to sweet deeds of mercy move the heart  
 Of him, who hates his brethren of mankind.  
 Turned are those beams from me, who fondly yet  
 Past joys, vain loves, and buried hopes regret.

Now all these sonnets, written, two of them, in early summer 1795, and one, the first, some time before that, speak retrospectively of love. The pleasant days were over, and had been over for some time.

It is not possible to describe Alice W——. Both in the sonnets, and again, a quarter of a century later, in the essay on Blakesware, Lamb tells us that she had fair hair; nothing else. "That Beauty with the cool blue pastoral drapery, and a lamb—that hung next the great bay window—with the bright yellow H——shire hair, and eye of watchet hue—so like my Alice!" I have tried to find this picture, but in vain. It probably was sold by auction at the Gilston sale, together with the other ancient treasures of Blakesware as Lamb knew them. Among the odd canvases at the old Rye House the eye rests upon no Beauty with cool blue pastoral drapery and a lamb. Pictures, however, are seldom destroyed, and time may yet bring to light, possibly in some Hertfordshire farm parlour, the portrait that reminded Lamb of Alice W——. In connection with Anna's fair hair it is interesting to note that the only other maiden who seems ever to have attracted Lamb's youthful eye was dark as a gipsy, as a glance at the portrait of Hester Savory, opposite page 238, will show.

Lamb says, in "Dream Children," that the children of his Alice (Ann Simmons) "call Bartrum father." Ann Simmons of Blenheims is known to have married a pawnbroker named Bartram in Princes Street, Leicester Square; and Lamb in later life is known, now and again, to have loitered on the pavement hoping to catch a glimpse of her face. Mrs. Jane Tween, of Widford, the daughter of Randal Norris, in a letter to Canon Ainger, says: "The last time I went to see Mrs. Bartram 'the fair haired maiden' so frequently alluded to and ever cherished in affectionate remembrance . . . she was then a widow residing in Fitzroy Street Fitzroy Square with her three daughters before Maria her second daughter was married to Dr. Coulson."<sup>1</sup>

I have I think made it clear that Lamb's romance was a closed chapter when he was still only nineteen or even eighteen, while its memory, as we shall see, had faded from his mind before he was twenty-two.<sup>2</sup> Although, it is true, Lamb was older for his years than most boys, his youth may serve as one reason why we should not expend too much sympathy upon his disappoint-

<sup>1</sup>According to Mr. Samuel Davey, who recently lectured on the subject, Lamb's first love was Mary Sumner, of Bishop's Stortford. She married a Captain Wilson and died in 1857.

<sup>2</sup>See page 106.



ment. Indeed if we reflect for a moment upon what was to happen, we are at once aware that had he and Ann ever been betrothed little but sorrow could have come of it; for the tragedy of September, 1796, would either have cruelly broken the engagement, or Lamb, by marrying, would probably have been unable to give his sister a home and thus would have lost for ever a companionship without which he would not have been the Charles Lamb that we know and reverence and love.

My own feeling is that such a sister as was Mary Lamb in her healthy state was a more congenial companion for Charles Lamb—to whom so many of the characteristics of the bachelor seem to have belonged from the first—than any wife would have been.

To return to Lamb's friends at this period, we find from a letter of Southey to Moxon in 1836 that Coleridge brought Lamb and himself together for the first time "in the winter of 1794-95." It was in January, 1795. Southey was twenty on August 12th, 1794, and was thus by six months Lamb's senior. He had left Balliol, had written *Joan of Arc* (in its first draft), had become engaged to Edith Fricker, and was busy in literary projects with both Coleridge and Robert Lovell. He had also, with Coleridge, just completed the scheme of Pantisocracy, which it is probable, or at any rate possible, Lamb was asked to join—unless a twinkle in his eye forewarned the two idealists. It was in order to lead Coleridge back to Sarah Fricker that Southey had come to London; and as events proved, he had better have remained at home. Lamb and he, whose friendship never reached the first order of intimacy, did not meet again until 1797.

In the same letter to Moxon Southey tells us a little more about John Lamb and his family in the winter of 1794-95. "When I saw the family (one evening only . . .), they were lodging somewhere near Lincoln's Inn, on the western side (I forget the street), and were evidently in uncomfortable circumstances. The father and mother were both living; and I have some dim recollection of the latter's invalid appearance. The father's senses had failed him before that time. He published some poems in quarto. Lamb showed me once an imperfect copy: 'The Sparrow's Wedding' was the title of the longest piece, and this was the author's favourite; he liked, in his dotage, to hear Charles read it."



“His most familiar friend,” Southey continues, “when I first saw him, was White, who held some office at Christ’s Hospital, and continued intimate with him as long as he lived.” This brings us to Lamb’s first association with authorship; and shows us too that his melancholy cannot have been constant. James White was a schoolfellow almost exactly Lamb’s own age, who after leaving Christ’s Hospital had entered the treasurer’s office there. Together, in White’s room at night, they were engaged on a comic gloss upon Shakespeare in the shape of a volume of letters supposed to have been written by Sir John Falstaff. The book, *Original Letters, etc., of Sir John Falstaff and His Friends*, was published in the summer of 1796. White’s name alone is given to it, but that Lamb had a share is beyond question: he could not have sat by inactive during the progress of a joke so near his heart. Indeed Southey’s testimony is that Lamb and White were joint authors, in which case the little volume contains the earliest specimens of Lamb’s prose that we possess. My own impression is that the Dedication is wholly Lamb’s.

Another schoolfellow of both Lamb and White, John Mathew Gutch, whom we shall meet later, wrote as follows of *Falstaff’s Letters*: “These letters were the production of my old schoolfellow, James White, with incidental hints and corrections by another schoolfellow, Charles Lamb. Amongst his friends, White was familiarly called ‘Sir John.’ I was present with him at a masquerade, when he personated Sir John Falstaff, in a dress borrowed from the wardrobe of Covent Garden Theatre, through the kindness of Fawcett, the comedian. His imitation of the character, or I should say personation, excited great mirth and applause, as well as considerable jealousy from some of the company present, supposed to be hired actors for the occasion; who, with much ill-will, procured a rope and held it across the room (at the Pantheon in Oxford Street), and White was obliged to take a leap over the rope to escape being thrown down. The exertion he underwent by this interruption, added to the weight of the dress, injured his health for some days afterward.

“We were at this time in the habit of meeting at the ‘Feathers’ in Hand Court, Holborn, to drink nips of Burton ale, as they were called. . . . White was a remarkably open-hearted, joyous

companion ; very intimate with the Lamb family, who were then lodging in [Little] Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

White's book is now forgotten, and is not likely ever to be read except by the curious few, despite Lamb's belief in its merits (a partiality which I think was not unassociated with paternal sentiment) ; but James White himself is immortal by reason of his presence in the essay on Chimney-Sweepers. He "burnishes" there for all time. "My pleasant friend Jem White . . . instituted an annual feast of chimney-sweepers, at which it was his pleasure to officiate as host and waiter. It was a solemn supper held in Smithfield, upon the yearly return of the fair of St. Bartholomew. Cards were issued a week before to the master-sweeps in and about the metropolis, confining the invitation to their younger fry. Now and then an elderly stripling would get in among us, and be good-naturedly winked at ; but our main body were infantry. One unfortunate wight, indeed, who, relying upon his dusky suit, had intruded himself into our party, but by tokens was providentially discovered in time to be no chimney-sweeper (all is not soot which looks so), was quitted out of the presence with universal indignation, as not having on the wedding garment ; but in general the greatest harmony prevailed. . . .

"The guests assembled about seven. In those little temporary parlours three tables were spread with napery, not so fine as substantial, and at every board a comely hostess presided with her pan of hissing sausages. The nostrils of the young rogues dilated at the savour. James White, as head waiter, had charge of the first table ; and myself, with our trusty companion Bigod [John Fenwick], ordinarily ministered to the other two. There was clambering and jostling, you may be sure, who should get at the first table—for Rochester in his maddest days could not have done the humours of the scene with more spirit than my friend. After some general expression of thanks for the honour the company had done him, his inaugural ceremony was to clasp the greasy waist of old dame Ursula (the fattest of the three), that stood frying and fretting, half-blessing, half-cursing 'the gentleman,' and imprint upon her chaste lips a tender salute, whereat the universal host would set up a shout that tore the concave, while hundreds of grinning teeth startled the night with their brightness.

"O it was a pleasure to see the sable youngers lick in the

unctuous meat, with *his* more unctuous sayings—how he would fit the tit bits to the puny mouths, reserving the lengthier links for the seniors—how he would intercept a morsel even in the jaws of some young desperado, declaring it ‘must to the pan again to be browned, for it was not fit for a gentleman’s eating’—how he would recommend this slice of white bread, or that piece of kissing-crust, to a tender juvenile, advising them all to have a care of cracking their teeth, which were their best patrimony,—how genteelly he would deal about the small ale, as if it were wine, naming the brewer, and protesting, if it were not good, he should lose their custom ; with a special recommendation to wipe the lip before drinking.

“Then we had our toasts—‘The King,’—the ‘Cloth,’—which, whether they understood or not, was equally diverting and flattering ;—and for a crowning sentiment, which never failed, ‘May the Brush supersede the Laurel!’ All these, and fifty other fancies, which were rather felt than comprehended by his guests, would he utter, standing upon tables, and prefacing every sentiment with a ‘Gentlemen, give me leave to propose so and so,’ which was a prodigious comfort to those young orphans ; every now and then stuffing into his mouth (for it did not do to be squeamish on these occasions) indiscriminate pieces of those reeking sausages, which pleased them mightily, and was the savouriest part, you may believe, of the entertainment.

Golden lads and lasses must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust—

“James White is extinct, and with him these suppers have long ceased. He carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died [in 1820]—of my world at least. His old clients look for him among the pens ; and, missing him, reproach the altered feast of St. Bartholomew, and the glory of Smithfield departed for ever.”



## CHAPTER VIII

## THE BEGINNING OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

1796

Coleridge at Bristol—John Lamb's Accident—Priestley—William Wordsworth.

WE come now to the date of the first letter in Lamb's correspondence that has been preserved—May 27th, 1796. That Coleridge, to whom it was addressed, should have taken such care of so many of the priceless series of letters that he received from Lamb at this period is one of the mysteries. If only he had kept all, our debt would be beyond appraisalment.

Coleridge, at this time, was in his twenty-fourth year. He had married Sarah Fricker in the previous October, and was now living at Bristol, meditating upon a thousand projects, talking much and occasionally lecturing and preaching. His faith in Pantisocracy was weakening, although he would not admit as much, and he was intensely displeased with Southey for giving it up completely. His magazine *The Watchman* had just ceased its brief life, to Lamb's expressed satisfaction; while his *Poems on Various Subjects*, with four sonnets by Lamb, and Southey's *Joan of Arc*, with Coleridge's "Vision" in it, were both on the eve of publication by Joseph Cottle of Bristol, to whose *Recollections* we must go for much of our information respecting this period.

The first letter that has been preserved, but not by any means the first of the series, shows us that Lamb had been employed as a medium between the philosopher and the landlord of the Salutation; for Lamb writes: "Make yourself perfectly easy about May. I paid his bill, when I sent your clothes. I was flush of money, and am so still to all the purposes of a single life, so give yourself no further concern about it. The money would be superfluous to me, if I had it." Lamb was never ex-



travagant ; more, he was even considered by superficial observers to be miserly ; but he always had money for his friends, from first to last, and it is, I think, a happy circumstance that this, the first paragraph of his first preserved letter, should illustrate his generosity.<sup>1</sup>

The principal news contained in this missive we have already read, on page 81. Incidentally, Lamb mentions that Valentine Le Grice has gone to Cornwall, and he encloses a sonnet addressed to Mary Lamb, of which he says : "The sonnet I send you has small merit as poetry but you will be curious to read it when I tell you it was written in my prison-house [the Hoxton Asylum] in one of my lucid Intervals.

" TO MY SISTER

" If from my lips some angry accents fell,  
Peevish complaint, or harsh reproof unkind,  
'Twas but the error of a sickly mind,  
And troubled thoughts, clouding the purer well,  
And waters clear, of Reason ; and for me,  
Let this my verse the poor atonement be,  
My verse, which thou to praise wast ever inclined  
Too highly, and with a partial eye to see  
No blemish : thou to me didst ever shew  
Fondest affection, and woud'st oftimes lend  
An ear to the desponding love sick lay,  
Weeping my sorrows with me, who repay  
But ill the mighty debt of love I owe,  
Mary, to thee, my sister and my friend."

The second letter—probably June 1st—contains several of the love sonnets, three of which I have quoted in the preceding chapter, Lamb having been asked by Coleridge to contribute seriously to the second edition of Coleridge's *Poems*, already in contemplation. Lamb assures Coleridge that there are "10,000 objections" against his paying him a visit at Bristol and thus acquaints him with a domestic trouble : "We have just learned that my poor brother has had a sad accident, a large stone blown down by yesterday's high wind has bruised his leg in a most shocking manner ; he is under the care of Cruikshanks." At the end of the letter Lamb writes : "Coleridge, in

<sup>1</sup> His sister says, in a letter to Sarah Stoddart in 1804, "My brother, who never makes up his mind whether he will be a Miser or a Spendthrift, is at all times a strange mixture of both."

reading your *R[eligious] Musings* I felt a transient superiority over you, I *have* seen Priestley. I love to see his name repeated in your writings. I love and honor him almost profanely. You would be charmed with his *sermons*, if you never read 'em.—You have doubtless read his books, illustrative of the doctrine of Necessity. Prefixed to a late work of his, in answer to Paine, there is a preface, giving an account of the Man and his services to Men, written by Lindsey, his dearest friend,—well worth your reading." This passage shows us that Lamb's mind was not wholly bounded by the drollery of James White and the fond regrets attaching to the memory of Anna. Later in life, as we shall see, his religion, ceasing to be articulate, was merged in conduct, but in his twenty-first year his interest in Priestley and his Unitarian and fatalistic creed was intense. To the end, I think, although this point is a little vague, Lamb remained nominally a Unitarian, a profession of faith to which probably he was first led by his Aunt Hetty (a constant attender at the Essex Street chapel) and in which he was fortified by Coleridge. Coleridge, however, not long after abandoned the gospel of Necessity absolutely.

One other passage in the letter of June 1st is noteworthy as containing the first mention of Wordsworth's name. "I shall be too ill," Lamb says, "to call on Wordsworth myself but will take care to transmit him his poem, when I have read it." Wordsworth, who was destined later to be among Lamb's most honoured friends, was now a young man of twenty-six. After travelling in France in 1791-92, where his Revolutionary doctrines were strengthened, he published the "Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches," in 1793, and found for the latter poem one sympathetic reader at least, in Coleridge, then at Cambridge. After much unsettlement of mind, in which he was endeavouring to decide upon a career and to reconcile the course of events in France with his gospel of liberty, Wordsworth became possessed of a legacy of £900, which, added to his own and his sister Dorothy's capital, and his salary for instructing the son of Basil Montagu, made it possible for him to take, with his sister, a farmhouse at Racedown, between Lyme Regis and Crewkerne, and devote his time largely to gratifying his poetical ambition. That was in 1795, the year in which he first met Coleridge.

During the Racedown period Wordsworth wrote some satires

in the manner of Juvenal, "Guilt and Sorrow," and his play "The Borderers." The poem to which Lamb refers was probably "Guilt and Sorrow," and we must suppose that Wordsworth either was staying in London or was proposing to visit it. There is no evidence, however, that Lamb met him before July of the following year, 1797, at Nether Stowey.

The next letter—June 10th—consists chiefly of criticism of Southey's *Joan of Arc* (with Coleridge's "Vision") and of Coleridge's *Poems*. Three of Lamb's four sonnets had been subjected to a process of improvement by Coleridge, and Lamb protests: "I love my sonnets because they are the reflected images of my own feelings at different times. . . . I charge you, Col., spare my ewe lambs." The principal news is that William Evans, brother of Coleridge's Mary Evans, had just come into the East India House. Evans seems never to have been more than an acquaintance; but his contribution to our knowledge of Lamb is important, since it was Evans who, twenty years later, introduced Talfourd to the circle.

In the next letter—June 13th—Lamb sends "The Grandame" (which is part of a long blank verse poem that either was never completed or was, in the remainder, destroyed) and expresses his intention of publishing it, with his other verses, through Biggs, Coleridge's printer. This project, however, came to nothing. Lamb also copies out some beauties from Massinger and Beaumont and Fletcher (in whom, even at this early date, he has discovered "a greater richness of poetical fancy than in any one, Shakespeare excepted"). Later we have a passage in a more familiar manner: "I have been drinking egg-hot and smoking Orinooko (associated circumstances, which ever forcibly recall to my mind our evenings and nights at the Salutation). . . . Coleridge, you know not my supreme happiness at having one on earth (though counties separate us) whom I can call a friend. Remember you those tender lines of Logan?—

' Our broken friendships we deplore,  
And loves of youth that are no more;  
No after friendships e'er can raise  
Th' endearments of our early days,  
And ne'er the heart such fondness prove,  
As when we first began to love.'

"I am writing at random, and half-tipsy, what you may not



*equally* understand, as you will be sober when you read it ; but *my* sober and *my* half-tipsy hours you are alike a sharer in. Good night.

‘ Then up rose our bard, like a prophet in drink,  
Craigdoroch, thou’lt soar when creation shall sink.’ ”

In the same letter Lamb is hopeful of being able to visit Bristol in a few weeks’ time. On July 1st he is still hopeful, but less confident, and the uncertainty leads to the first passage of anything like Elian fancy in the correspondence: “ Hope is a charming, lively, blue-eyed wench, and I am always glad of her company, but could dispense with the visitor she brings with her, her younger sister, Fear, a white-liver’d, lilly-cheeked, bashful, palpitating, awkward hussey, that hangs like a green girl at her sister’s apronstrings, and will go with her whithersoever *she* goes.” George Dyer, to whom we shall come later, is mentioned for the first time in this letter ; and at the end is the statement that Richardson, head of the Accountant’s Department at the East India House, has refused to allow Lamb to take the Bristol holiday, on the ground of the illness of other clerks. There is also the statement that Mrs. Lamb has entirely lost the use of her limbs—a condition which seems to have kept her daughter in constant attendance, by night as well as day. Here perhaps—added to the father’s senile dependence—we may see part of the cause of Mary Lamb’s subsequent breakdown.

On July 5th Lamb sends some verses addressed “ To Sara and S. T. C. ” lamenting his inability to visit them ; and later in the day he writes again, to modify the poem, and adds some lines to Cowper, on his recovery from one of his fits of mania, “ the sorest malady of all.” Lamb adds in prose that a recovery from “ lunacies ” begets “ pity, and pity love, and love, admiration.” He also expresses pleasure to hear of Coleridge’s project of coming to town to be joint editor of the *Chronicle*, a scheme which did not, however, bear fruit, and he tells him that *Falstaff’s Letters* are being published and that Dyer has already reviewed them in the *Critical Review*. With this letter the correspondence, in so far as it has been preserved, ceases until the end of September, when it reopens under the most tragic of circumstances.



## CHAPTER IX

## THE TRAGEDY

1796 (*continued*)

ON the morning of Wednesday, September 21st, 1796, the Lamb family, although not in a prosperous condition, may yet have considered itself not unfortunate. Charles Lamb was in his twenty-second year, in tolerable health, and fairly happy among his friends and books, his correspondence and his tender regrets. His father, though, according to Southey, in his dotage, was probably occasionally still visited by his old humour and sprightliness; Mrs. Lamb, although ill, may have been for the most part a serene invalid; Aunt Hetty was probably kept busy with house work; Mary Lamb, now a woman of thirty-two, was actively engaged as a mantua-maker, assisted by a little apprentice, helping and learning; and John Lamb (now recovering from his accident) was in a good position at the South-Sea House. Except that Mary had been somewhat overwrought and peculiar of late, the outlook was clear.

Suddenly and completely everything was changed. On the evening of Wednesday, September 21st, Mary Lamb, not for the first time in her life, developed symptoms of mania which made it necessary for the doctor to be consulted, and early the next morning Charles Lamb called on Dr. Pitcairn, but failed to find him. Later in the day for a few dreadful moments his sister's reason utterly left her, and in a paroxysm of rage she stabbed her mother to the heart. Lamb's letter to Coleridge on September 27th, 1796, tells the story:—

“MY DEAREST FRIEND—White or some of my friends or the public papers by this time may have informed you of the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. I will only give you the outlines. My poor dear dearest sister in a fit of insanity

has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a mad house, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses,—I eat and drink and sleep, and have my judgment I believe very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr. Norris of the Bluecoat school has been very very kind to us, and we have no other friend, but thank God I am very calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write,—as religious a letter as possible—but no mention of what is gone and done with.—With me ‘the former things are passed away,’ and I have something more to do than [than] to feel——

“God almighty have us all in his keeping.—

“C. LAMB.

“Mention nothing of poetry. I have destroyed every vestige of past vanities of that kind. Do as you please, but if you publish, publish mine (I give free leave) without name or initial, and never send me a book, I charge you.

“You [your] own judgment will convince you not to take any notice of this yet to your dear wife.—You look after your family,—I have my reason and strength left to take care of mine. I charge you, don’t think of coming to see me. Write. I will not see you if you come. God almighty love you and all of us——”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lamb’s letter indicates that he was present at the tragic moment or immediately afterwards; but the report of the inquest in the *Morning Chronicle* for September 26th, 1796, makes no reference to him:—

“On Friday afternoon the Coroner and a respectable Jury sat on the body of a Lady in the neighbourhood of Holborn, who died in consequence of a wound from her daughter the preceding day. It appeared by the evidence adduced, that while the family were preparing for dinner, the young lady seized a case knife laying on the table, and in a menacing manner pursued a little girl, her apprentice, round the room; on the eager calls of her helpless infirm mother to forbear, she renounced her first object, and with loud shrieks approached her parent.

“The child by her cries quickly brought up the landlord of the house, but too late—the dreadful scene presented to him the mother lifeless, pierced to the heart, on a chair, her daughter yet wildly standing over her with the fatal knife, and the venerable old man, her father, weeping by her side, himself bleeding at the forehead from the effects of a severe blow he received from one of the forks she had been madly hurling about the room.

“For a few days prior to this the family had observed some symptoms of insanity in her, which had so much increased on the Wednesday evening, that her brother early the next morning went in quest of Dr. Pitcairn—had that gentleman been met with, the fatal catastrophe had, in all probability, been prevented.

“It seems the young Lady had been once before, in her earlier years, deranged,

Lamb's fears that his sister might have to be removed to a hospital, by which I suppose him to mean Bedlam, or some other public asylum from which there was no escape, fortunately were groundless. Documentary evidence seems no longer to exist, but we know that Mary Lamb was permitted to remain under restraint in a private house until her brother was able, in the spring of 1797, to find a home for her. Her removal was then allowed by the authorities on his giving (I quote Talfourd's words) "his solemn engagement that he would take her under his care for life." Charles Lamb when he made this promise was just twenty-two. It was not, however, until his father's death early in 1799 that Mary Lamb joined her brother under one roof.

Coleridge's reply to Lamb's letter, which Lamb called "an inestimable treasure," is preserved. It ends thus: "As to what regards yourself, I approve altogether of your abandoning what you justly call vanities. I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God; we cannot arrive at any portion of heavenly bliss without in some measure imitating Christ. And they arrive at the largest inheritance who imitate the most difficult parts of his character, and bowed down and crushed under foot, cry in fulness of faith, 'Father, thy will be done.'

"I wish above measure to have you for a little while here—no visitants shall blow on the nakedness of your feelings—you shall be quiet, and your spirit may be healed. I see no possible objection, unless your father's helplessness prevent you, and unless you are necessary to him. If this be not the case, I charge you write me that you will come.

"I charge you, my dearest friend, not to dare to encourage gloom or despair—you are a temporary sharer in human miseries that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine nature. I charge you, if by any means it be possible, come to me."

On October 3rd Lamb wrote to Coleridge again. I quote a

from the harassing fatigues of too much business.—As her carriage towards her mother was ever affectionate in the extreme, it is believed that to the increased attentiveness, which her parents' infirmities called for by day and night, is to be attributed the present insanity of this ill-fated young woman.

"It has been stated in some of the Morning Papers, that she has an insane brother also in confinement—this is without foundation.

"The Jury of course brought in their Verdict, *Lunacy*."



large part of the letter: "It will be a comfort to you, I know, to know that our prospects are somewhat brighter. My poor dear dearest sister, the unhappy and unconscious instrument of the Almighty's judgments to our house, is restored to her senses; to a dreadful sense and recollection of what has past, awful to her mind, and impressive (as it must be to the end of life) but temper'd with religious resignation, and the reasonings of a sound judgment, which in this early stage knows how to distinguish between a deed committed in a transient fit of frenzy, and the terrible guilt of a Mother's murder. I have seen her. I found her this morning calm and serene, far very very far from an indecent forgetful serenity; she has a most affectionate and tender concern for what has happend. Indeed from the beginning, frightful and hopeless as her disorder seemed, I had confidence enough in her strength of mind, and religious principle, to look forward to a time when *even she* might recover tranquillity.

"God be praised, Coleridge, wonderful as it is to tell, I have never once been otherwise than collected, and calm; even on the dreadful day and in the midst of the terrible scene I preserved a tranquillity, which bystanders may have construed into indifference, a tranquillity not of despair; is it folly or sin in me to say that it was a religious principle that *most* supported me? I allow much to other favorable circumstances. I felt that I had something else to do than to regret; on that first evening my Aunt was lying insensible, to all appearance like one dying,—my father, with his poor forehead plaisterd over from a wound he had received from a daughter dearly loved by him, and who loved him no less dearly,—my mother a dead and murder'd corpse in the next room—yet was I wonderfully supported. I closed not my eyes in sleep that night, but lay without terrors and without despair. I have lost no sleep since. I had been long used not to rest in things of sense, had endeavord after a comprehension of mind, unsatisfied with the 'ignorant present time,' and this kept me up. I had the whole weight of the family thrown on me, for my brother, little disposed (I speak not without tenderness for him) at any time to take care of old age and infirmities, had now, with his bad leg, an exemption from such duties, and I was now left alone.

"One little incident may serve to make you understand my way of managing my mind. Within a day or 2 after the fatal ONE, we drest for dinner a tongue, which we had had salted for some



weeks in the house. As I sat down a feeling like remorse struck me,—this tongue poor Mary got for me, and can I partake of it now, when she is far away—a thought occurred and relieved me,—if I give in to this way of feeling, there is not a chair, a room, an object in our rooms, that will not awaken the keenest griefs, I must rise above such weaknesses.—I hope this was not want of true feeling. I did not let this carry me, tho', too far.

“On the very 2d day (I date from the day of horrors) as is usual in such cases there were a matter of 20 people I do think supping in our room. They prevailed on me to eat *with them* (for to eat I never refused). They were all making merry! in the room,—some had come from friendship, some from busy curiosity, and some from Interest; I was going to partake with them, when my recollection came that my poor dead mother was lying in the next room, the very next room, a mother who thro' life wished nothing but her children's welfare—indignation, the rage of grief, something like remorse, rushed upon my mind in an agony of emotion,—I found my way mechanically to the adjoining room, and fell on my knees by the side of her coffin, asking forgiveness of heaven, and sometimes of her, for forgetting her so soon. Tranquillity returned, and it was the only violent emotion that mastered me, and I think it did me good.

“I mention these things because I hate concealment, and love to give a faithful journal of what passes within me. Our friends have been very good. Sam Le Grice who was then in town was with me the first 3 or 4 first days, and was as a brother to me, gave up every hour of his time, to the very hurting of his health and spirits, in constant attendance and humouring my poor father. Talk'd with him, read to him, play'd at cribbage with him (for so short is the old man's recollection, that he was playing at cards, as tho' nothing had happened, while the Coroner's Inquest was sitting over the way!) Samuel wept tenderly when he went away, for his mother wrote him a very severe letter on his loitering so long in town, and he was forced to go. Mr. Norris of Christ Hospital has been as a father to me, Mrs. Norris as a mother; tho' we had few claims on them. A Gentleman, brother to my God-mother, from whom we never had right or reason to expect any such assistance, sent my father twenty pounds,—and to crown all these God's blessings to our family at such a time, an old Lady, a cousin of my father and Aunt's, a Gentlewoman of fortune, is to

take my Aunt and make her comfortable for the short remainder of her days.

“My Aunt is recover’d and as well as ever, and highly pleased at thoughts of going,—and has generously given up the interest of her little money (which was formerly paid my Father for her board) wholly and solely to my Sister’s use. Reckoning this we have, Daddy and I for our two selves and an old maid servant to look after him, when I am out, which will be necessary, £170 or £180 (rather) a year, out of which we can spare 50 or 60 at least for Mary, while she stays at Islington, where she must and shall stay during her father’s life for his and her comfort. I know John will make speeches about it, but she shall not go into an hospital. The good Lady of the mad house, and her daughter, an elegant sweet behaved young Lady, love her and are taken with her amazingly, and I know from her own mouth she loves them, and longs to be with them as much.—Poor thing, they say she was but the other morning saying, she knew she must go to Bethlem for life; that one of her brothers would have it so, but the other would wish it not, but be obliged to go with the stream; that she had often as she passed Bedlam thought it likely ‘here it may be my fate to end my days—’ conscious of a certain flightiness in her poor head oftentimes, and mindful of more than one severe illness of that nature before. A Legacy of £100, which my father will have at Xmas, and this 20 I mentioned before with what is in the house, will much more than set us Clear,—if my father, an old servant maid, and I, can’t live and live comfortably on £130 or £120 a year we ought to burn by slow fires, and I almost would, that Mary might not go into an hospital. Let me not leave one unfavourable impression on your mind respecting my Brother. Since this has happened he has been very kind and brotherly; but I fear for his mind,—he has taken his ease in the world, and is not fit himself to struggle with difficulties, nor has much accustomed himself to throw himself into their way,—and I know his language is already, ‘Charles, you must take care of yourself, you must not abridge yourself of a single pleasure you have been used to,’ &c &c and in that style of talking. But you, a necessarian, can respect a difference of mind, and love what *is amiable* in a character not perfect. He has been very good, but I fear for his mind. Thank God, I can unconnect myself with him, and shall manage all my father’s monies in future myself, if I take charge of Daddy,

which poor John has not even hinted a wish, at any future time even, to share with me. . . .

“Of all the people I ever saw in the world my poor sister was most and thoroughly devoid of the least tincture of selfishness—I will enlarge upon her qualities, poor dear dearest soul, in a future letter for my own comfort, for I understand her thoroughly; and if I mistake not in the most trying situation that a human being can be found in, she will be found (I speak not with sufficient humility, I fear, but humanly and foolishly speaking) she will be found, I trust, uniformly great and amiable; God keep her in her present mind, to whom be thanks and praise for all His dispensations to mankind.”

On October 17th Lamb writes again, describing his mother's lack of sympathetic understanding with a frankness that he never repeated. “Mary continues serene and cheerful,—I have not by me a little letter she wrote to me, for, tho' I see her almost every day yet we delight to write to one another (for we can scarce see each other but in company with some of the people of the house), I have not the letter by me but will quote from memory what she wrote in it. ‘I have no bad terrifying dreams. At midnight when I happen to awake, the nurse sleeping by the side of me, with the noise of the poor mad people around me, I have no fear. The spirit of my mother seems to descend, and smile upon me, and bid me live to enjoy the life and reason which the Almighty has given me—I shall see her again in heaven; she will then understand me better; my Grandmother too will understand me better, and will then say no more, as she used to do, “Polly, what are those poor crazy moither'd brains of yours thinking of always?”

“Poor Mary, my Mother indeed *never understood* her right. She loved her, as she loved us all, with a Mother's love; but in opinion, in feeling, and sentiment, and disposition, bore so distant a resemblance to her daughter, that she never understood her right. Never could believe how much *she* loved her—but met her caresses, her protestations of filial affection, too frequently with coldness and repulse.—Still she was a good mother, God forbid I should think of her but *most* respectfully, *most* affectionately. Yet she would always love my brother above Mary, who was not worthy of one tenth of that affection, which Mary had a right to claim. But it is my sister's gratifying recollection,



that every act of duty and of love she could pay, every kindness (and I speak true, when I say to the hurting of her health, and, most probably, in great part to the derangement of her senses) thro' a long course of infirmities and sickness, she could shew her, SHE EVER DID. I will some day, as I promised, enlarge to you upon my Sister's excellencies; 'twill seem like exaggeration; but I will do it."

Talfourd tells us that Mary Lamb's calm state of mind in respect to the tragedy continued throughout her normal life—fine testimony to her native sense. "Little could any one," he writes, "observing Miss Lamb in the habitual serenity of her demeanour, guess the calamity in which she had partaken, or the malady which frightfully chequered her life. From Mr. Lloyd, who, although saddened by impending delusion, was always found accurate in his recollection of long past events and conversations, I learned that she had described herself, on her recovery from the fatal attack, as having experienced, while it was subsiding, such a conviction, that she was absolved in heaven from all taint of the deed in which she had been the agent—such an assurance that it was a dispensation of Providence for good, though so terrible—such a sense, that her mother knew her entire innocence, and shed down blessings upon her, as though she had seen the reconcilment in solemn vision—that she was not sorely afflicted by the recollection. It was as if the old Greek notion, of the necessity for the unconscious shedder of blood, else polluted though guiltless, to pass through a religious purification, had, in her case, been happily accomplished; so that, not only was she without remorse, but without other sorrow than attends on the death of an infirm parent in a good old age." And on page 17 I have quoted a passage from a letter in which Mary Lamb, in 1803, says that her mother is rarely out of her thoughts.

A little later Coleridge wrote a further consolatory letter, apparently in a similar strain to his first; but the document has not been preserved. It is illustrative of Lamb's clear judgment and inability to countenance what he considered false or wrong, that even under the conditions which prompted Coleridge's letter, and in his own state of grief, he should think it his duty to reply thus (October 24th, 1796): "I read your letters with my sister, and they give us both abundance of delight. Especially they please us two, when you talk in a religious strain,—not



but we are offended occasionally with a certain freedom of expression, a certain air of mysticism, more consonant to the conceits of pagan philosophy, than consistent with the humility of genuine piety. To instance now in your last letter—you say, ‘it is by the press [*sic*] that God hath given finite spirits both evil and good (I suppose you mean *simply* bad men and good men), a portion as it were of His Omnipresence!’ Now, high as the human intellect comparatively will soar, and wide as its influence, malign or salutary, can extend, is there not, Coleridge, a distance between the Divine Mind and it, which makes such language blasphemy? Again, in your first fine consolatory epistle you say, ‘you are a temporary sharer in human misery, that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine Nature.’ What more than this do those men say, who are for exalting the man Christ Jesus into the second person of an unknown Trinity,—men, whom you or I scruple not to call idolaters? Man, full of imperfections, at best, and subject to wants which momentarily remind him of dependence; man, a weak and ignorant being, ‘servile’ from his birth ‘to all the skiey influences,’ with eyes sometimes open to discern the right path, but a head generally too dizzy to pursue it; man, in the pride of speculation, forgetting his nature, and hailing in himself the future God, must make the angels laugh. Be not angry with me, Coleridge; I wish not to cavil; I know I cannot *instruct* you; I only wish to *remind* you of that humility which best becometh the Christian character. God, in the New Testament (*our best guide*), is represented to us in the kind, condescending, amiable, familiar light of a *parent*: and in my poor mind ’tis best for us so to consider of Him, as our *heavenly* Father, and our *best Friend*, without indulging too bold conceptions of His nature. Let us learn to think humbly of ourselves, and rejoice in the appellation of ‘dear children,’ ‘brethren, and ‘co-heirs with Christ of the promises,’ seeking to know no further.

“I am not insensible, indeed I am not, of the value of that first letter of yours, and I shall find reason to thank you for it again and again long after that blemish in it is forgotten. It will be a fine lesson of comfort to us, whenever we read it; and read it we often shall, Mary and I.”

Coleridge must at once have replied to justify himself, for on

October 28th Lamb returns to the subject: "I am not ignorant that to be a partaker of the Divine Nature is a phrase to be met with in Scripture: I am only apprehensive, lest we in these latter days, tintured (some of us perhaps pretty deeply) with mystical notions and the pride of metaphysics, might be apt to affix to such phrases a meaning, which the primitive users of them, the simple fishermen of Galilee for instance, never intended to convey. With that other part of your apology I am not quite so well satisfied. You seem to me to have been straining your comparing faculties to bring together things infinitely distant and unlike; the feeble narrow-sphered operations of the human intellect and the everywhere diffused mind of Deity, the peerless wisdom of Jehovah. Even the expression appears to me inaccurate—portion of omnipresence—omnipresence is an attribute whose very essence is unlimitedness. How can omnipresence be affirmed of anything in part? But enough of this spirit of disputatiousness."

The passage of arms is particularly interesting in showing us that a new Lamb had sprung into being. Before the tragedy he was a youth, mistrustful of his powers, fond of his melancholy, a little inclined to self-pity, and, although intellectually vigorous, not unwilling to be dependent and a hero-worshipper. With the tragedy came a rallying of his stronger qualities; the spirit of responsibility informed him; he became a man and the equal of any man, even Coleridge. Henceforward, although frailties beset him and occasionally conquered, he was never anything but himself and he saw nothing but his duty.

In the same letter (October 28th) we have sight of Mary again. "I have satisfaction in being able to bid you rejoice with me in my sister's continued reason and composedness of mind. Let us both be thankful for it. I continue to visit her very frequently, and the people of the house are vastly indulgent to her; she is likely to be as comfortably situated in all respects as those who pay twice or thrice the sum. They love her, and she loves them, and makes herself very useful to them. Benevolence sets out on her journey with a good heart, and puts a good face on it, but is apt to limp and grow feeble, unless she calls in the aid of self-interest by way of crutch. In Mary's case, as far as respects those she is with, 'tis well that these principles are so likely to co-operate. I am rather at a loss sometimes for

books for her,—our reading is somewhat confined, and we have nearly exhausted our London library. She has her hands too full of work to read much, but a little she must read ; for reading was her daily bread.”

The letter also gives signs that Lamb's mind was recovering its normal tenor. He was becoming again interested in men and books. “Among all your quaint readings did you ever light upon Walton's ‘Complete Angler’? I asked you the question once before ; it breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart ; there are many choice old verses interspersed in it ; it would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it ; it would Christianise every discordant angry passion ; pray make yourself acquainted with it. Have you made it up with Southey yet? Surely one of you two must have been a very silly fellow, and the other not much better, to fall out like boarding-school misses ; kiss, shake hands, and make it up?” Coleridge and Southey had quarrelled nominally over Southey's abandonment of Pantisocracy, when he sailed for Lisbon at the end of 1795 ; but they were probably destined to fall out even had there been no ideal community on the banks of the Susquehannah as a cause of dissension. To have married the sister of Coleridge's wife was probably as good a preparation for disagreement as Southey can have needed, while by temperament, having a stern sense of order and an ingrained Conservatism, he was in many ways Coleridge's antipodes. Southey returned to England in the summer of 1796, and about the time of Lamb's letter a kind of reconciliation was effected, but he never really trusted Coleridge again, nor was Coleridge ever again quite easy in his brother-in-law's company.



## CHAPTER X

1796 (*concluded*)

Lines "To a Friend Who Declared His Intention of Writing no more Poetry"  
—Poems, by Charles Lamb, of the India House—Home Perplexities—  
Charles Lloyd—Hartley Coleridge Born—Aunt Hetty—Mary Lamb.

**I**N the letter of September 27th, telling of the tragedy, Lamb had said that he wished to hear no more of his poetry, and that he was burning everything of the kind that he possessed. In a later letter to Coleridge—December 10th, 1796—we get an idea of our loss. "I burned all my own verses, all my book of extracts from Beaumont and Fletcher and a thousand sources: I burned a little journal of my foolish passion which I had a long time kept—

'Noting ere they pass away  
The little lines of yesterday.'

I almost burned all your letters,—I did as bad, I lent 'em to a friend to keep out of my brother's sight, should he come and make inquisition into our papers, for, much as he dwelt upon your conversation while you were among us, and delighted to be with you, it has been his fashion ever since to depreciate and cry you down,—you were the cause of my madness—you and your damned foolish sensibility and melancholy—and he lamented with a true brotherly feeling that we ever met, even as the sober citizen, when his son went astray upon the mountains of Parnassus, is said to have 'cursed wit and Poetry and Pope.'<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge replied to Lamb's renunciation with the lines "To

<sup>1</sup> A slight confusion is in Lamb's mind: the passage in Pope's "Epistle to Arbuthnot" runs:—

Arthur, whose giddy son neglects the laws,  
Imputes to me and my damned works the cause:  
Poor Cornus sees his frantic wife elope,  
And curses wit, and poetry, and Pope.



a Friend Who has Declared His Intention of Writing no more Poetry"—

Dear Charles! whilst yet thou wert a babe, I ween  
 That Genius plunged thee in that wizard fount  
 Hight Castalie: and (sureties of thy faith)  
 That Pity and Simplicity stood by,  
 And promised for thee, that thou shouldst renounce  
 The world's low cares and lying vanities,  
 Steadfast and rooted in the heavenly Muse,  
 And washed and sanctified to Poesy.  
 Yes—thou wert plunged, but with forgetful hand  
 Held, as by Thetis erst her warrior son:  
 And with those recreant unbaptised heels  
 Thou'rt flying from thy bounden ministeries—  
 So sore it seems and burthensome a task  
 To weave unwithering flowers! But take thou heed:  
 For thou art vulnerable, wild-eyed boy,  
 And I have arrows mystically dipped  
 Such as may stop thy speed. Is thy Burns dead?  
 And shall he die unwept, and sink to earth  
 "Without the meed of one melodious tear"?  
 Thy Burns, and Nature's own beloved bard,  
 Who to the "Illustrious of his native Land  
 So properly did look for patronage."  
 Ghost of Mæcenas! hide thy blushing face!  
 They snatched him from the sickle and the plough—  
 To gauge ale-firkins.

Oh! for shame return!

On a bleak rock, midway the Aonian mount,  
 There stands a lone and melancholy tree,  
 Whose aged branches to the midnight blast  
 Make solemn music: pluck its darkest bough,  
 Ere yet the unwholesome night-dew be exhaled,  
 And weeping wreath it round thy Poet's tomb.  
 Then in the outskirts, where pollutions grow,  
 Pick the rank henbane and the dusky flowers  
 Of night-shade, or its red and tempting fruit,  
 These with stopped nostril and glove-guarded hand  
 Knit in nice intertexture, so to twine,  
 The illustrious brow of Scotch Nobility.

This poem Lamb also burned, at once; but he soon came to a more reasonable view of things. In spite of sorrow and calamity, one's life must go forward, one's destiny be fulfilled. Lamb's destiny was to write, and by November his interest in writing had begun to revive. "The Fragments I now send you I want printed to get rid of 'em; for, while they stick burr-like to my memory, they tempt me to go on with the idle trade of

versifying, which I long—most sincerely I speak it, I long to leave off, for it is unprofitable to my soul; I feel it is; and these questions about words, and debates about alterations, take me off, I am conscious, from the properer business of *my* life. Take my sonnets once for all, and do not propose any amendments, or mention them again in any shape to me, I charge you. I blush that my mind can consider them as things of any worth. And pray admit or reject these fragments, as you like or dislike them, without ceremony. Call 'em Sketches, Fragments, or what you will, but do not entitle any of my *things* Love Sonnets, as I told you to call 'em; 'twill only make me look little in my own eyes; for it is a passion of which I retain *nothing*; 'twas a weakness, concerning which I may say, in the words of Petrarch (whose life is now open before me), 'if it drew me out of some vices, it also prevented the growth of many virtues, filling me with the love of the creature rather than the Creator, which is the death of the soul.' Thank God, the folly has left me for ever; not even a review of my love verses renews one wayward wish in me; and if I am at all solicitous to trim 'em out in their best apparel, it is because they are to make their appearance in good company."

Lamb returned to the subject of his verses a few days later. "I mean to inscribe them [the poems] to my sister. It will be unexpected, and it will give her pleasure; or do you think it will look whimsical at all? As I have not spoke to her about it, I can easily reject the idea. But there is a monotony in the affections, which people living together or, as we do now, very frequently seeing each other, are apt to give in to: a sort of indifference in the expression of kindness for each other, which demands that we should sometimes call to our aid the trickery of surprise."

He goes on to say that the title-page is to stand thus:—

POEMS,

CHIEFLY LOVE SONNETS,

BY

CHARLES LAMB, OF THE INDIA HOUSE.

"Under this title the following motto, which, for want of room, I put over leaf, and desire you to insert, whether you

like it or no. May not a gentleman choose what arms, mottoes, or armorial bearings the herald will give him leave, without consulting his republican friend, who might advise none? May not a publican put up a sign of the Saracen's Head, even though his undiscerning neighbour should prefer, as more genteel, the Cat and Gridiron?

"This beauty, in the blossom of my youth,  
When my first fire knew no adulterate incense,  
Nor I no way to flatter but my fondness,  
In the best language my true tongue could tell me,  
And all the broken sighs my sick heart lend me,  
I sued and served. Long did I love this lady."

MASSINGER.

### THE DEDICATION.

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THE FEW FOLLOWING POEMS,  
CREATURES OF THE FANCY AND THE FEELING  
IN LIFE'S MORE VACANT HOURS,  
PRODUCED, FOR THE MOST PART, BY  
LOVE IN IDLENESS,  
ARE,  
WITH ALL A BROTHER'S FONDNESS,  
INSCRIBED TO  
MARY ANN LAMB,  
THE AUTHOR'S BEST FRIEND AND SISTER.

---

"This is the pomp and paraphernalia of parting, with which I take my leave of a passion which has reigned so royally (so long) within me; thus, with its trappings of laureatship, I fling it off, pleased and satisfied with myself that the weakness troubles me no longer. I am wedded, Coleridge, to the fortunes of my sister and my poor old father. Oh! my friend, I think sometimes, could I recall the days that are past, which among them should I choose? not those 'merrier days,' not the 'pleasant days of hope,' not 'those wanderings with a fair hair'd maid,' which I have so often and so feelingly regretted, but the days, Coleridge, of a *mother's* fondness for her *school-boy*. What would I give to call her back to earth for *one* day, on my knees to ask her pardon for all those little asperities of temper which, from time to time, have given her gentle spirit pain; and the day, my friend, I trust will come; there will be 'time enough'

for kind offices of love, if 'Heaven's eternal year' be ours. Hereafter, her meek spirit shall not reproach me. Oh, my friend, cultivate the filial feelings! and let no man think himself released from the kind 'charities' of relationship: these shall give him peace at the last; these are the best foundation for every species of benevolence."

Lamb's next letter to Coleridge—December 2nd, 1796—is mainly criticism of the projected second edition of the *Poems*. But we have also this light on his home: "Are we NEVER to meet again? How differently I am circumstanced now—I have never met with any one, never shall meet with any one, who could or can compensate me for the loss of your society—I have no one to talk all these matters about too—I lack friends, I lack books to supply their absence. But these complaints ill become me: let me compare my present situation, prospects, and state of mind, with what they were but 2 months back—but 2 months. O my friend, I am in danger of forgetting the awful lessons then presented to me—remind me of them; remind me of my Duty. Talk seriously with me when you do write.

"I thank you, from my heart I thank you for your solicitude about my Sister. She is quite well,—but must not, I fear, come to live with us yet a good while. In the first place, because at present it would hurt her, and hurt my father, for them to be together: secondly from a regard to the world's good report, for I fear, I fear, tongues will be busy *whenever* that event takes place. Some have hinted, one man has prest it on me, that she should be in perpetual confinement—what she hath done to deserve, or the necessity of such an hardship, I see not; do you?<sup>1</sup> I am starving at the India House, near 7 o'clock without my dinner, and so it has been and will be almost all the week. I get home at night o'erwearied, quite faint,—and then to CARDS with my father, who will not let me enjoy a meal in peace—but I must conform to my situation, and I hope I am, for the most part, not unthankful.

"I am got home at last, and, after repeated games at Cribbage have got my father's leave to write awhile: with difficulty got

<sup>1</sup> It is generally considered that the "one man" who urged that Mary Lamb should remain in perpetual confinement was John Lamb the younger.



it, for when I expostulated about playing any more, he very aptly replied, 'If you won't play with me, you might as well not come home at all.' The argument was unanswerable, and I set to afresh."

Meanwhile Coleridge had taken a pupil, Charles Lloyd of Birmingham, the son of a Quaker banker and philanthropist, whom he had met on his tour in search of subscribers to the *Watchman*. Charles Lloyd, who was a few days older than Lamb, had been intended for his father's bank, but his health and tastes were alike opposed to the plan. He therefore went to Edinburgh to study medicine, but soon abandoning that project, became an inmate of the house of Thomas Wilkinson, Wordsworth's friend, at Yanwath, where, in 1795, he wrote and published his first volume of poems—one of the songs in which is supposed to have furnished Lamb with the name Rosamund Gray. It was early in 1796 that Coleridge and Lloyd met, and later in the year it was arranged that Lloyd should join Coleridge at Bristol, as pupil, friend and fellow-poet and philosopher. Coleridge addressed to him some enthusiastic verses on their union, entitled, with a ponderosity to which Coleridge was at no time of his life a stranger, "To a Young Friend on his Proposing to Domesticate with the Author," in which (for at that time Coleridge was capable of all) we find these lines:—

Ah! dearest youth! it were a lot divine  
To cheat our noons in moralising mood,  
While west winds fanned our temples toil-bedewed:  
Then downwards slope, oft pausing, from the mount,  
To some lone mansion, in some woody dale,  
Where smiling with blue eye, Domestic Bliss  
Gives *this* the Husband's, *that* the Brother's kiss!

Lloyd accompanied Coleridge to Bristol in September, to find, on their arrival, the new-born David Hartley Coleridge: and Lloyd was quickly honoured by becoming the recipient of the sonnet "To a Friend who asked, How I felt when the Nurse first presented my Infant to me." A few days later Coleridge informed Thomas Poole in a letter that Lloyd was winning upon him hourly, and he copied out two sonnets which Lloyd, "a man of great genius," had written in an evening at Birmingham, one of which alluded to the "Conviction of the truth of Christianity," which he had received from Coleridge, having been previously

“if not a deist yet quite a sceptic.” So began a companionship that, in Lamb’s phrase, ought to develop into “Elysium on earth.” To tell here the whole story of the falsification of Lamb’s forecast would be out of place. We shall see enough of the friendship’s progress and decay in the course of the next few months in Lamb’s life.

Lloyd, who had lately lost his maternal grandmother, had addressed to that lady’s memory a number of poems marked by strong affection, which had been sumptuously published by Joseph Cottle of Bristol. The volume was entitled *Poems on the Death of Priscilla Farmer* and it contained Lamb’s fragment “The Grandame,” which Lloyd, who had seen it in manuscript, was anxious to include. Early in December Coleridge sent the volume to Lamb, together with a privately printed collection of sonnets by various contemporary writers, including himself, Lloyd and Lamb, which he had arranged to be bound up with the sonnets of his and Lamb’s beloved Bowles. On December 9th, in acknowledging the gift, Lamb says that his sister is pretty well, and he gives some news of Aunt Hetty and the wealthy relation (whose identity cannot be discovered) with whom she had gone to live. “The old hag of a wealthy relation, who took my aunt off our hands in the beginning of trouble, has found out that she is ‘indolent and mulish’—I quote her own words—and that her attachment to us is so strong that she can never be happy apart. The Lady, with delicate Irony, remarks that, if I am not an Hypocrite, I shall rejoyce to receive her again; and that it will be a means of making me more fond of home to have so dear a friend to come home to! The fact is, she is jealous of my aunt’s bestowing any kind recollections on us, while she enjoys the patronage of her roof. She says she finds it inconsistent with her own ‘ease and tranquility’ to keep her any longer, & in fine summons me to fetch her home. Now, much as I should rejoyce to transplant the poor old creature from the chilling air of such patronage, yet I know how straitend we are already. . . .” Aunt Hetty, however, came home; but, as we shall see, not for long.

On December 10th Lamb writes again, mentioning how much he lacks one or two understanding friends, especially at the office. He adds: “I can only converse with you by letter and with the dead in their books. My sister, indeed, is all I can

wish in a companion ; but our spirits are alike poorly, our reading and knowledge from the self-same sources, our communication with the scenes of the world alike narrow : never having kept separate company, or any 'company' '*together*'—never having read separate books, and few books *together*—what knowledge have we to convey to each other ? In our little range of duties and connexions, how few sentiments can take place without friends, with few books, with a taste for religion rather than a strong religious habit ! We need some support, some leading-strings to cheer and direct us." This is the last letter of 1796 that has been preserved.

It was on the last day of 1796, as I conjecture, that John Lamb, Charles Lamb and Aunt Hetty (and perhaps John Lamb junior, but I am doubtful) moved finally from 7 Little Queen Street, that house of shadow, to 45 Chapel Street, Pentonville, very near the Angel Tavern, and not far from the Islington madhouse where Mary Lamb was living.

## CHAPTER XI

1797

Charles Lloyd in London—Quakers—Death of Aunt Hetty—Coleridge and Lloyd's First Breach—Mary Lamb Leaves the Asylum—Nether Stowey—Hazlitt's Description of Coleridge and Wordsworth—Dorothy Wordsworth—Lamb at Southey's—Poems on Mrs. Lamb—The Higginbottom Sonnets.

IN one of the first letters of 1797—January 10th—Lamb tells Coleridge that Mary Lamb has been seriously ill, but has “nigh recovered.” It contains this passage on Lamb’s state of mind: “My letter is full of nothingness. I talk of nothing. But I must talk. I love to write to you. I take a pride in it. It makes me think less meanly of myself. It makes me think myself not totally disconnected from the better part of Mankind. I know, I am too dissatisfied with the beings around me,—but I cannot help occasionally exclaiming ‘Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Meshech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar.’ I know I am no ways better in practice than my neighbours—but I have a taste for religion, an occasional earnest aspiration after perfection, which they have not. I gain nothing by being with such as myself—we encourage one another in mediocrity—I am always longing to be with men more excellent than myself. All this must sound odd to you; but these are my predominant feelings, when I sit down to write to you, and I should put force upon my mind, were I to reject them. Yet I rejoyce, and feel my privilege with gratitude, when I have been reading some wise book, such as I have just been reading, Priestley on Philosophical necessity, in the thought that I enjoy a kind of communion, a kind of friendship even, with the great and good. Books are to me instead of friends. I wish they did not resemble the latter in their scarceness.”



Early in January Charles Lloyd, visiting London, called on Lamb, one result of the meeting being the verses "To Charles Lloyd, an Unexpected Visitor," which Lamb sent to Coleridge on January 16th. From the warmth of feeling in this poem we may gather something of Lamb's loneliness at that time:—

O! sweet are all the Muses' lays,  
And sweet the charm of matin bird—  
'Twas long, since these estranged ears  
The sweeter voice of friend had heard.

The voice hath spoke: the pleasant sounds  
In memory's ear, in after-time  
Shall live, to sometimes rouse a tear,  
And sometimes prompt an honest rhyme.

For when the transient charm is fled,  
And when the little week is o'er,  
To cheerless, friendless solitude  
When I return, as heretofore—

Long, long, within my aching heart,  
The grateful sense shall cherish'd be;  
I'll think less meanly of myself,  
That Lloyd will sometimes think on me,

We can understand how at such a time Lloyd's sympathy and seriousness of mind would have appealed to Lamb. As Lamb wrote on another occasion, he was "all kindness," his defects in those days being for the most part the defects of that quality. Lloyd, on his part, as he told his brother Robert, in a letter, was "warmly interested" in Lamb's "favour" . . . "he is a most interesting young man."

Lloyd had left behind him, as a souvenir, the Journal of John Woolman, the American Quaker, whose slender writings form a record of beautiful spiritual character and simple moral courage. ("Get them by heart," was Lamb's advice in his *Elia* essay on "A Quakers' Meeting.") The book seems to have had an immediate influence, for in the letter to Coleridge of February 13th Lamb says: "Tell Lloyd I have had thoughts of turning Quaker, and have been reading, or am rather just beginning to read, a most capital book, good thoughts in good language, William Penn's 'No Cross, no Crown:;' I like it immensely. Unluckily I went to one of his meetings, tell him, in St. John Street, yesterday, and saw a man under all

the agitations and workings of a fanatic, who believed himself under the influence of some 'inevitable presence.' This cured me of Quakerism ; I love it in the books of Penn and Woolman, but I detest the vanity of a man thinking he speaks by the Spirit, when what he says an ordinary man might say without all that quaking and trembling." The incident recurs in the essay of "A Quakers' Meeting," written twenty-four years later, but in much the same words—one of the many instances of Lamb's gift of keeping together all his thoughts on every subject.

Throughout his life, as that essay indicates, the simple grey creed of the Quakers had a certain fascination for Charles Lamb ; but he never again came so near an acceptance of it as after Lloyd's visit. After the defection of Lloyd, and the death of Hester Savory, he seems to have been without Quaker acquaintances until the beginning of his friendship with Bernard Barton, in 1822. Hood describes him as affecting in his dress a plainness that might easily have caused strangers, in those days when Quakers were less of this world, to mistake him for one of the Foxian community.

In February Lamb lost his old friend Aunt Hetty. Writing to Coleridge on February 5th (misdated January 5th), Lamb says : "My poor old aunt, whom you have seen, the kindest, goodest creature to me when I was at school ; who used to toddle there to bring me fag, when I, school-boy like, only despised her for it, and used to be ashamed to see her come and sit herself down on the old coal hole steps as you went into the old grammar school, and open her apron and bring out her bason, with some nice thing she had caused to be saved for me ;—the good old creature is now lying on her death bed. I cannot bear to think on her deplorable state. To the shock she received on that our evil day, from which she never completely recovered, I impute her illness. She says, poor thing, she is glad she is come home to die with me. I was always her favourite :

'No after friendship e'er can raise  
The endearments of our early days,  
Nor e'er the heart such fondness prove,  
As when it first began to love.' "

Sarah Lamb was buried at St. James's, Clerkenwell, on February 13th, 1797. Her nephew on the day of her funeral wrote

a poem (printed in *Blank Verse*, 1798) of which this is the opening :—

Thou too art dead, [Aunt Hetty]! very kind  
 Hast thou been to me in my childish days,  
 Thou best good creature. I have not forgot  
 How thou didst love thy Charles, when he was yet  
 A prating schoolboy : I have not forgot  
 The busy joy on that important day,  
 When, child-like, the poor wanderer was content  
 To leave the bosom of parental love,  
 His childhood's play-place, and his early home,  
 For the rude fosterings of a stranger's hand,  
 Hard uncouth tasks, and school-boy's scanty fare.  
 How did thine eye peruse him round and round,  
 And hardly know him in his yellow coats,  
 Red leathern belt, and gown of russet blue !  
 Farewell, good aunt !  
 Go thou, and occupy the same grave-bed  
 Where the dead mother lies.

Nearly two months elapse before the next letter, and then—on April 7th—we find Lamb complaining to Coleridge of his long silence. “Do what you will, Col., you may hurt me and vex me by your silence, but you cannot estrange my heart from you all. I cannot scatter friendship like chuck-farthings, nor let them drop from mine hand like hour-glass sand. I have two or three people in the world to whom I am more than indifferent, and I can't afford to whistle them off to the winds.” The letter also says : “Lloyd tells me he has been very ill, and was on the point of leaving you. I addressed a letter to him at Birmingham : perhaps he got it not, and is still with you. I hope his ill-health has not prevented his attending to a request I made in it, that he would write again very soon to let me know how he was. I hope to God poor Lloyd is not very bad, or in a very bad way. Pray satisfy me about these things.” Here we may see part of the reason of Coleridge's silence. The fact is, I think, that Coleridge's dissatisfaction with Lloyd, which was to become acute, had already set in. It is possible that Coleridge, who was not above the human weakness of jealousy, resented Lloyd's intimacy with Lamb ; more probably Lloyd had repeated at Nether Stowey some epigram upon Coleridge which Lamb had let drop, not malicious in itself, but malicious when indiscreetly passed on by a third person. At any rate there was the beginning of a breach between the two, and Lloyd, after



staying for a while with Poole at Nether Stowey, on his return from London in February, finally left Coleridge's roof in March, and returned to Birmingham. The matter is involved in mystery, but I think we may fairly assume Coleridge's silence to be in some way connected with it.

The letter of April 7th also says of Mary Lamb that her brother has taken her out of her confinement, and placed her in lodgings at Hackney, where he spends his Sundays, holidays, and odd time with her. "She boards herself. In one little half year's illness, and in such an illness of such a nature and of such consequences! to get her out into the world again, with a prospect of her never being so ill again—this is to be ranked not among the common blessings of Providence. May that merciful God make tender my heart, and make me as thankful, as in my distress I was earnest in my prayers. Congratulate me on an ever-present and never-alienable friend like her."

On April 15th we hear of Lloyd again. "Poor dear Lloyd! I had a letter from him yesterday; his state of mind is truly alarming. He has, by his own confession, kept a letter of mine unopened three weeks, afraid, he says, to open it, lest I should speak upbraidingly to him; and yet this very letter of mine was in answer to one, wherein he informed me that an alarming illness had alone prevented him from writing. You will pray with me, I know, for his recovery; for surely, Coleridge, an exquisiteness of feeling like this must border on derangement. But I love him more and more, and will not give up the hope of his speedy recovery, as he tells me he is under Dr. Darwin's regimen."

The next letter—June 13th—acknowledges, at last, a letter from Coleridge containing another invitation to Stowey. This, as it happened, Lamb was to accept. There are references to Lloyd, from whom Lamb seems to have been receiving letters, and who seems to be better. Meanwhile the second edition of Coleridge's *Poems*, with Lamb and Lloyd's contributions, was at the printers. It is indicative of Lamb's loneliness, his lack of friends, that when referring in one of his letters to this forthcoming book he asks for only two copies. "2 will be enough—or indeed 1—but 2 better." A young poet usually has need of many copies of his first book.

Lamb was at Stowey in June. We have no outside informa-



tion of his visit beyond Coleridge's poem "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison," written while Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth and Lamb were walking out together, Coleridge being confined to the garden by an accident during the visit. The poem has a patronising tone which is not wholly agreeable, as though the country had no secrets left for the author and nothing but secrets for the unformed youth from town.

Yes! they wander on  
In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,  
My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined  
And hungered after Nature, many a year,  
In the great City pent, winning thy way  
With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain  
And strange calamity! . . .

My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook  
Beat its straight path along the dusky air  
Homewards, I blest it! deeming, its black wing  
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)  
Had cross'd the mighty orb's dilated glory,  
While thou stood'st gazing; or when all was still,  
Flew creaking o'er thy head, and had a charm  
For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom  
No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

(When these verses were printed in the *Annual Anthology* in 1800, Lamb wrote to Coleridge: "For God's sake (I never was more serious), don't make me ridiculous any more by terming me gentle-hearted in print, or do it in better verses. It did well enough five [three] years ago when I came to see you, and was moral coxcomb enough at the time you wrote the lines to feed upon such epithets; but, besides that, the meaning of gentle is equivocal at best, and almost always means poor-spirited, the very quality of gentleness is abhorrent to such vile trumpeting. My *sentiment* is long since vanished. I hope my *virtues* have done *sucking*. I can scarce think but you meant it in joke. I hope you did, for I should be ashamed to think that you could think to gratify me by such praise, fit only to be a cordial to some green-sick sonneteer." He adds, in a letter a few days later: "In the next edition of the 'Anthology' (which Phœbus avert and those nine other wandering maids also!) please to blot out gentle-hearted, and substitute drunken-dog, ragged-head, seld-shaven, odd-eyed, stuttering, or any other epithet which

truly and properly belongs to the gentleman in question. And for Charles read Tom, or Bob, or Richard, for more delicacy." Mr. William Archer in a recent essay on Lamb has a passage on his gentleness which it is a pleasure to quote: "We may call him 'gentle' in the sense in which we apply the term to Chaucer, to Izaak Walton, to Goldsmith, to Scott, and could not possibly apply it to Milton, or Johnson, or Byron, or Carlyle. So far is the epithet for conveying any suggestion of effeminacy that one is tempted to say with Antony:—

' His life was gentle ; and the elements  
 So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up  
 And say to all the world, " This was a man ! " ' )

William Hazlitt, whom Lamb was not to meet until a few years later, was at Stowey in the spring of 1798, nine months later, and he has left descriptions of the two poets at that time which help to add vividness to our impression of Lamb's visit. Coleridge he thus describes in his essay "My First Acquaintance with the Poets" (written in 1817 and 1823): "His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent; his chin good-humoured and round; but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he has done. It might seem that the genius of his face as from a height surveyed and projected him (with sufficient capacity and huge aspiration) into the world unknown of thought and imagination, with nothing to support or guide his veering purpose, as if Columbus had launched his adventurous course for the New World in a scallop, without oars or compass. So at least I comment on it after the event. Coleridge, in his person, was rather above the common size, inclining to the corpulent, or like Lord Hamlet, 'somewhat fat and pury.' His hair (now, alas! grey) was then black and glossy as the raven's, and fell in smooth masses over his forehead. This long pendulous hair is peculiar to enthusiasts, to those whose minds tend heavenward; and is traditionally inseparable (though of a different colour) from the pictures of Christ. It ought to belong, as a character, to all who preach *Christ crucified*, and Coleridge was at that time one of those!"

And here is Wordsworth, who in 1798 was twenty-eight years of age, by five years Lamb's senior: "He answered in some



S. T. COLERIDGE IN 1798

FROM THE DRAWING BY HANCOCK IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY





degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge, in his gait, not unlike his own 'Peter Bell.' There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense, high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. Chantrey's bust wants the marking traits; but he was teased into making it regular and heavy: Haydon's head of him, introduced into the 'Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem,' is the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine. He instantly began to make havoc of the half of a Cheshire cheese on the table, and said, triumphantly, that 'his marriage with experience had not been so productive as Mr. Southey's in teaching him a knowledge of the good things of this life.' He had been to see the 'Castle Spectre,' by Monk Lewis, while at Bristol, and described it very well. He said 'it fitted the taste of the audience like a glove.' This *ad captandum* merit was, however, by no means a recommendation of it, according to the severe principles of the new school, which reject rather than court popular effect. Wordsworth, looking out of the low, latticed window, said, 'How beautifully the sun sets on that yellow bank!'

Of Dorothy Wordsworth we have Coleridge's classic description, preserved in Cottle's *Reminiscences*, in a letter belonging to 1797. "Wordsworth and his exquisite sister are with me. She is a woman indeed! in mind I mean, and heart; for her person is such, that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her rather ordinary; if you expected to see an ordinary woman, you would think her pretty! but her manners are simple, ardent, impressive. In every motion, her most innocent soul outbeams so brightly, that who saw would say,

'Guilt was a thing impossible in her.'

Her information various. Her eye watchful in minutest observation of nature; and her taste, a perfect electrometer. It bends, protrudes, and draws in, at subtlest beauties, and most reconдите faults."

Wordsworth, in the summer of 1797, was just about to move to Alfoxden, his "large mansion in a large park with seventy head of deer," and to begin his partnership with Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads*. He had written already only his "Poetical Sketches," "Guilt and Sorrow" and "The Borderers:" his real work was all before him. To what extent Lamb was stimulated intellectually by his intercourse with the Wordsworths we do not know; but probably it was the renewed ambition with which he returned to London from this visit that set him to work upon *John Woodvil* and *Rosamund Gray*. The early chapters of *Rosamund Gray*, which have a childlike simplicity and clarity, may indeed be said to be Lamb's contribution to the war against convention which the *Lyrical Ballads* chiefly waged. Neither Wordsworth nor his sister mentions Lamb at Nether Stowey, and we do not know to what extent he was in their company; but the friendship thus begun lasted to the end.

On returning from Stowey Lamb wrote to Coleridge, probably at the end of July or early August, recalling the pleasure of the visit. "You will oblige me too by sending me my great-coat, which I left behind in the oblivious state the mind is thrown into at parting—is it not ridiculous that I sometimes envy that great-coat lingering so cunningly behind?—at present I have none—so send it me by a Stowey waggon, if there be such a thing, directing for C. L., No. 45, Chapel-Street, Pentonville, near London. But above all, *that Inscription!*—it will recall to me the tones of all your voices—and with them many a remembered kindness to one who could and can repay you all only by the silence of a grateful heart.<sup>1</sup> I could not talk much, while I was with you, but my silence was not sullenness, nor I hope from any bad motive; but, in truth, disuse has made me awkward at it. I know I behaved myself, particularly at Tom Poole's, and at Cruikshank's, most like a sulky child; but company and converse are strange to me. It

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth's "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew Tree."

was kind in you all to endure me as you did." Lamb also says that he had looked out for John Thelwall on the way back but had not seen him—Thelwall being "Citizen Thelwall," one of the companions of Hardy and Horne Tooke in the Tower in 1794, a friend of Coleridge, and afterwards, as we shall see, of Lamb too. He had abandoned Republicanism for the moment and was farming on the Wye.

*Poems by S. T. Coleridge. Second Edition. To which are now added Poems by Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd* was published in the summer of 1797. It had as motto a passage purporting to come from Groscollius, meaning "Double is the bond which binds us—friendship, and a kindred taste in poetry. Would that neither death nor lapse of time could dissolve it!" As we shall see, the bond was to be dissolved within a very few months. In this little volume Lamb was allowed to have his own way in all things: the text of his poems was untouched by Coleridge, and the dedication to his sister stood as he had wished. The book made very little impression.

The week at Nether Stowey was not to be Lamb's only period of absence in 1797. A letter to Coleridge, dated August 24th, tells of a sudden visit to Southey, at Burton, in Hampshire. Lamb accompanied Charles Lloyd, just then in a state of unhappy perplexity about his engagement to Sophia Pemberton, whose parents disapproved of the match. "He meant to return with me, who could stay only one night. While there, he at one time thought of going to consult you, but changed his intention and stayed behind with Southey, and wrote an explicit letter to Sophia. I came away on the Tuesday, and on the Saturday following, *last Saturday*, receiv'd a letter dated Bath, in which he said he was on his way to Birmingham—that Southey was accompanying him—and that he went for the purpose of persuading Sophia to a Scotch marriage. . . . He said if he *had* come to you, he could never have brought himself to leave you." Lamb also says that he has since had no news. (I may here anticipate a little and say that Lloyd did marry Sophia Pemberton, but not until 1799, and according to ordinary procedure.)

In September Lamb sends Coleridge one of his most touching poems, afterwards included in *Blank Verse*, published in 1798, suggested by the anniversary of his mother's death:—



"Thou and I, dear friend,  
 With filial recognition sweet, shall know  
 One day the face of our dear mother in heaven,  
 And her remember'd looks of love shall greet  
 With answering looks of love, her placid smiles  
 Meet with a smile as placid, and her hand  
 With drops of fondness wet, nor fear repulse.

"Be witness for me, Lord, I do not ask  
 Those days of vanity to return again  
 (Nor fitting me to ask, nor thee to give),  
 Vain loves, and "wanderings with a fair-hair'd maid;"  
 (Child of the dust as I am), who so long  
 My foolish heart steep'd in idolatry,  
 And creature-loves. Forgive it, O my Maker!  
 If in a mood of grief, I sin almost  
 In sometimes brooding on the days long past,  
 (And from the grave of time wishing them back),  
 Days of a mother's fondness to her child—  
 Her little one! Oh, where be now those sports  
 And infant play-games? Where the joyous troops  
 Of children, and the haunts I did so love?  
 O my companions! O ye loved names  
 Of friend, or playmate dear, gone are ye now.  
 Gone divers ways; to honour and credit some;  
 And some, I fear, to ignominy and shame!  
 I only am left, with unavailing grief  
 One parent dead to mourn, and see one live  
 Of all life's joys bereft, and desolate:  
 Am left, with a few friends, and one above  
 The rest, found faithful in a length of years,  
 Contented as I may, to bear me on,  
 T' the not unpeaceful evening of a day  
 Made black by morning storms."

The dear friend of the first line is of course Mary Lamb; the one friend above the rest, at the close of the poem, is, I have no doubt, Coleridge.

In the volume entitled *Blank Verse*, which Lamb and Charles Lloyd published together, the following poem, dated October, 1797, is placed next that from which I have just quoted:—

WRITTEN SOON AFTER THE PRECEDING POEM

Thou should'st have longer liv'd, and to the grave  
 Have peacefully gone down in full old age!  
 Thy children would have tended thy gray hairs.  
 We might have sat, as we have often done,  
 By our fireside, and talk'd whole nights away,  
 Old times, old friends, and old events recalling;



With many a circumstance, of trivial note,  
 To memory dear, and of importance grown,  
 How shall we tell them in a stranger's ear?  
 A wayward son oft-times was I to thee;  
 And yet, in all our little bickerings,  
 Domestic jars, there was, I know not what,  
 Of tender feeling, that were ill exchange'd  
 For this world's chilling friendships, and their smiles  
 Familiar, whom the heart calls strangers still.  
 A heavy lot hath he, most wretched man!  
 Who lives the last of all his family.  
 He looks around him, and his eye discerns  
 The face of the stranger, and his heart is sick.  
 Man of the world, what canst thou do for him?  
 Wealth is a burden, which he could not bear;  
 Mirth a strange crime, the which he dares not act;  
 And wine no cordial, but a bitter cup.  
 For wounds like his Christ is the only cure,  
 And gospel promises are his by right,  
 For these were given to the poor in heart.  
 Go, preach thou to him of a world to come,  
 Where friends shall meet, and know each other's face.  
 Say less than this, and say it to the winds.

This poem and those belonging to the same period were, with the exception of two veiled references in the *Elia* essays, the last of Lamb's published writings in which his mother is mentioned—a silence which we may assume was due partly to his own disinclination to recall poignant memories, but even more to the wish not to distress his sister, who, after joining him in 1799, would naturally read all he wrote. Yet the evidence of Talfourd is that there was no call for any such reticence. Mary Lamb, he says, "never shrank from alluding to her mother, when any topic connected with her own youth made such a reference, in ordinary respects, natural; but spoke of her as though no fearful remembrance was associated with the image; so that some of her most intimate friends, who knew of the disaster, believed that she had never become aware of her own share in its horrors. It is still more singular that, in the wanderings of her insanity, amidst all the vast throngs of imagery she presented of her early days, this picture never recurred, or, if ever, not associated with shapes of terror." None the less I believe Lamb to have abstained from reference to his mother largely from fear of any possible effect upon his sister. One may be more sensitive for others than they are for themselves.

In the same September letter—the last of 1797—Lamb

remarks: "You use Lloyd very ill, never writing to him. I tell you again that his is not a mind with which you should play tricks. He deserves more tenderness from you. For myself, I must spoil a little passage of Beaumont and Fletcher to adapt it to my feelings :—

' I am prouder  
That I was once your friend, tho' now forgot,  
Than to have had another true to me ' "—

for not only had Coleridge not written, but Lamb was still waiting for his great-coat.

Meanwhile Lloyd was at Bath with Southey; and that would be another cause of resentment to Coleridge, since Southey and he were doomed to be on bad terms. That Coleridge entertained mischievous feelings is certain, as it must have been at this time that he composed the unlucky Higginbottom satire—a series of three sonnets in ridicule of himself and his two poetical associates, printed in November, 1797, in the *Monthly Magazine*, a periodical in which Lloyd and Lamb's verses had frequently appeared. Writing to Cottle, Coleridge says that the sonnets expose "that affectation of affectedness, of jumping and misplaced accent, in commonplace epithets, flat lines forced into poetry by italics (signifying how well and mouthishly the author would read them), puny pathos, etc., etc. . . . I think they may do good to our young Bards." This is one of the three :—

#### TO SIMPLICITY

O ! I do love thee, meek *Simplicity* !  
For of thy lays the lulling simpleness  
Goes to my heart and soothes each small distress,  
Distress though small, yet haply great to me !  
'Tis true on Lady Fortune's gentlest pad  
I amble on ; yet, though I know not why,  
So sad I am !—but should a friend and I  
Grow cool and *miff*, O ! I am *very* sad !  
And then with sonnets and with sympathy  
My dreamy bosom's mystic woes I pall ;  
Now of my false friend plaining plaintively.  
Now raving at mankind in general ;  
But, whether sad or fierce, 'tis simple all,  
All very simple, meek *Simplicity* !<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, Southey, who was not in Higginbottom's mind at all when he wrote the sonnets, took "Simplicity" to be an attack upon himself. Southey, it might be added, became also a satirist of contemporary versifiers, inventing in Coleridge's manner a futile poet, named, with equal humour, Abel Shufflebottom.

We have no record of Lamb's feelings on reading the parodies ; nor indeed was there reason for him to resent them, his verse being far more genuine, and less vulnerable, than that of either of his companions. But Lloyd probably suffered much, especially as many of his more intimate poems, here ridiculed, had been composed in the society of the parodist and had had his approval at the time.

## CHAPTER XII

1798

Mary Lamb Again Ill—"The Old Familiar Faces"—The Alienation of Coleridge—Theses Quædam Theologicæ—Exit Charles Lloyd—The Anti-Jacobins—Lamb Hits Back.

LAMB and Coleridge cannot have fallen out, for on January 28th, 1798, Lamb says, "You have writ me many kind letters, and I have answered none of them." The reason was that Mary Lamb had had a relapse, necessitating removal from her Hackney lodging and a return to restraint. The attack must have occurred in December, for in the *Blank Verse* volume is a poem which clearly refers to it:—

## WRITTEN ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1797

I am a widow'd thing, now thou art gone!  
 Now thou art gone, my own familiar friend,  
 Companion, sister, help-mate, counsellor!  
 Alas! that honour'd mind, whose sweet reproof  
 And meekest wisdom in times past have smooth'd  
 The unfilial harshness of my foolish speech,  
 And made me loving to my parents old,  
 (Why is this so, ah God! why is this so?)  
 That honour'd mind become a fearful blank,  
 Her senses lock'd up, and herself kept out  
 From human sight or converse, while so many  
 Of the foolish sort are left to roam at large,  
 Doing all acts of folly, and sin, and shame?  
 Thy paths are mystery!

Yet I will not think,  
 Sweet friend, but we shall one day meet, and live  
 In quietness, and die so, fearing God.  
 Or if *not*, and these false suggestions be  
 A fit of the weak nature, loth to part  
 With what it lov'd so long, and held so dear;  
 If thou art to be taken, and I left  
 (More sinning, yet unpunish'd, save in thee),





CHARLES LAMB (AGED 23)

FROM THE DRAWING BY ROBERT HANCOCK IN 1798. NOW IN THE  
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY



It is the will of God, and we are clay  
 In the potter's hands ; and, at the worst, are made  
 From absolute nothing, vessels of disgrace,  
 Till, his most righteous purpose wrought in us,  
 Our purified spirits find their perfect rest.

Lamb's letter to Coleridge of January 28th continues : " An unnatural indifference has been creeping on me since my last misfortunes, or I should have seized the first opening of a correspondence with *you*. To you I owe much under God. In my brief acquaintance with you in London, your conversations won me to the better cause, and rescued me from the polluting spirit of the world. I might have been a worthless character without you ; as it is, I do possess a certain improvable portion of devotional feelings, tho' when I view myself in the light of divine truth, and not according to the common measures of human judgment, I am altogether corrupt and sinful. This is no cant. I am very sincere.

"These last afflictions, Coleridge, have failed to soften and bend my will. They found me unprepared. My former calamities produced in me a spirit of humility and a spirit of prayer. I thought they had sufficiently disciplined me ; but the event ought to humble me. If God's judgments now fail to take away from me the heart of stone, what more grievous trials ought I not to expect ? I have been very querulous, impatient under the rod—full of little jealousies and heart-burnings.—I had well nigh quarrelled with Charles Lloyd ; and for no other reason, I believe, than that the good creature did all he could to make me happy. The truth is, I thought he tried to force my mind from its natural and proper bent ; he continually wished me to be from home ; he was drawing me *from* the consideration of my poor dear Mary's situation, rather than assisting me to gain a proper view of it with religious consolations. I wanted to be left to the tendency of my own mind in a solitary state which, in times past, I knew had led to quietness and a patient bearing of the yoke. He was hurt that I was not more constantly with him ; but he was living with White, a man to whom I had never been accustomed to impart my *dearest feelings*, tho' from long habits of friendliness, and many a social and good quality, I loved him very much. I met company there sometimes—indiscriminate company. Any

society almost, when I am in affliction, is sorely painful to me. I seem to breathe more freely, to think more collectedly, to feel more properly and calmly, when alone. All these things the good creature did with the kindest intentions in the world, but they produced in me nothing but soreness and discontent. I became, as he complained, 'jaundiced' towards him . . . but he has forgiven me—and his smile, I hope, will draw all such humours from me. I am recovering, God be praised for it, a healthiness of mind, something like calmness—but I want more religion—”

Coleridge seems to have suggested that Mary Lamb, for a while at least, and, I assume, after her recovery, should make her home at Nether Stowey, for Lamb says, “Your invitation went to my very heart, but you have a power of exciting interest, of leading all hearts captive, too forcible to admit of Mary’s being with you. I consider her as perpetually on the brink of madness. I think you would almost make her dance within an inch of the precipice: she must be with duller fancies and cooler intellects. I know a young man of this description, who has suited her these twenty years, and may live to do so still, if we are one day restored to each other.”

It was at this time that “The Old Familiar Faces” was written, the poem by which Lamb is perhaps best known. In their original form the verses ran thus:—

#### THE OLD FAMILIAR FACES

Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?

I had a mother, but she died, and left me,  
Died prematurely in a day of horrors—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have had playmates, I have had companions,  
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,  
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a love once, fairest among women.  
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.



I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man.  
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly ;  
Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like, I paced round the haunts of my childhood.  
Earth seem'd a desert I was bound to traverse,  
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother !  
Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling ?  
So might we talk of the old familiar faces.

For some they have died, and some they have left me,  
*And some are taken from me* ; all are departed ;  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

When he reprinted the poem in his *Works*, in 1818, Lamb struck out the first stanza. The friend of the fifth stanza is Lloyd ; the friend of the seventh is Coleridge ; the italicised words in the last stanza refer to Mary Lamb's return to her asylum. Only rarely in his poetry does Lamb attain to a final and universal utterance, but in their tragic tenderness and melancholy these few lines are I think unsurpassed in the language.

We come now to Lamb's only estrangement from his first and closest friend, which culminated in the spring of 1798. The story, in the absence of any letters from Lamb or Lloyd, is not simple, but briefly it may be told thus. Lloyd, as we have seen, was living in London with James White, and Lamb was much with them. Lloyd was busy with his share of *Blank Verse*, most of Lamb's contributions to which we have seen ; and Lamb had already set to work upon *Rosamund Gray*, in which Lloyd was deeply interested. These literary exercises were, I imagine, not unassociated with Coleridge's resentment—for it is human to dislike to see a late disciple either displaying independence or passing under another influence ; and Coleridge was always curiously human when it came to the point.

But Lloyd added offence to offence. In Mr. Dykes Campbell's words : " In March [1798] there had been talk of a third edition of Coleridge's poems, and on hearing of it Lloyd begged Cottle to 'persuade' Coleridge to omit his. This caused Coleridge to reply, smilingly, that no persuasion was needed for the omission of verses published at the earnest request of the author ; and that though circumstances had made the Groscollian motto now

look ridiculous, he accepted the punishment of his folly, closing his letter with the characteristically sententious reflection—"By past experience we build up our moral being."

The story may be carried on in the words in which I have previously told it in *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*. What happened after is not clear, but Coleridge seems to have found in Lloyd's behaviour cause for grief so intense that it led him to retire to the "lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton," where, to allay the disturbance of his mind, he had recourse to opium, and where, under its influence, he composed "Kubla Khan." (Coleridge himself assigns an earlier date to the poem, but Mr. Dykes Campbell's chronology is more trustworthy.) The poet continued to brood over the rupture of a friendship that had begun so auspiciously. In the middle of May, when his second child was born, we find him, in writing to Poole concerning an impending bereavement, telling him that he can the better sympathise by reason of sorrows of his own that have "cut more deeply" into his heart "than they ought to have done;" which Mr. Dykes Campbell considered a further allusion to Lloyd's attitude, and to the fact that Lamb was also becoming alienated.

In June, 1798, Cottle, hoping to patch up the disagreement, wrote to Lloyd urging him to visit Coleridge. "I cannot," was Lloyd's reply, "think that I have acted with, or from, passion towards him. Even my solitary night thoughts have been easy and calm when they have dwelt on him. . . . I love Coleridge, and can forget all that has happened. At present I could not well go to Stowey. I could scarcely excuse so sudden a removal from my parents. Lamb quitted me yesterday, after a fortnight's visit. I have been much interested in his society. I never knew him so happy in my life. I shall write to Coleridge to-day."

On Coleridge's side there was, however, more to forgive: there was Lloyd's novel *Edmund Oliver*. This was the young man's crowning offence, for in it he had made use of Coleridge's own experiences as Private Silas Tomkyn Comberbach. "The incidents," said the author in his preface, "relative to the army were given me by an intimate friend, who was himself eye-witness to one of them, and can produce testimony to the truth of the other two." That Coleridge's own story, told to Lloyd

at his fireside, had been drawn upon there can be no doubt. Moreover, the novel contained other passages which Coleridge was quick to apply to himself: Edmund Oliver's love-fits and departure from college tallied with his own experience; the description of him—"His large glistening eye—his dark eyebrows—there was the same bend in the shoulder . . . and the dark hair"—fitted Coleridge too; and this piece of self-revelation in which Oliver elsewhere indulged was painfully applicable to the poet: "I have at all times a strange dreaminess about me, which makes me indifferent to the future, if I can by any means fill the present with sensations. With that dreaminess I have gone on here from day to day; if at any time thought troubled, I have swallowed some spirits, or had recourse to my laudanum." Lloyd's conduct was indefensible, and Coleridge's anger, which was excessive, was not lessened by the circumstance that the novel was dedicated to Lamb.

Where Lamb's sympathies lay we do not know. Probably they were divided, with a bias in favour of Lloyd, since he considered Coleridge to have taken insufficient pains to understand him. Smarting under a sense of injury, possibly tormented by Lloyd's injudicious recollections of privileged personal remarks of Coleridge, Lamb seems to have told Dorothy Wordsworth in a letter that he did not mean to write to Coleridge any more. This being a time when everything that was said was repeated, Coleridge was duly informed (by Lloyd), and straightway wrote a letter containing the following passages: "When I wrote to you that my Sonnet to Simplicity was not composed with reference to Southey, you answered me (I believe these were the words): 'It was a lie too gross for the grossest ignorance to believe;' and I was not angry with you, because the assertion which the grossest ignorance would believe a lie the Omniscient knew to be truth. This, however, makes me cautious not too hastily to affirm the falsehood of an assertion of Lloyd's that in Edmund Oliver's love-fit, leaving college, and going into the army he had no sort of allusion to or recollection of my love-fit, leaving college, and going into the army, and that he never thought of my person in the description of Oliver's person in the first letter of the second volume. This cannot appear stranger to me than my assertion did to you, and therefore I will suspend my absolute faith. . . ."



“I have been unfortunate in my connections. Both you and Lloyd became acquainted with me when your minds were far from being in a composed or natural state, and you clothed my image with a suit of notions and feelings which could belong to nothing human. You are restored to comparative saneness, and are merely wondering what is become of the Coleridge with whom you were so passionately in love; *Charles Lloyd's* mind has only changed his disease, and he is now arraying his *ci-devant* Angel in a flaming San Benito—the whole ground of the garment a dark brimstone and plenty of little devils flourished out in black. Oh, me! Lamb, ‘even in laughter the heart is sad!’”

To a large extent Coleridge's attitude was justified, but we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that his rhetoric (as so often in his life) was being used to gloss over former neglect of duty. He had treated neither Lloyd nor Lamb with the loving consideration which he had led them both to believe he cherished for them. He had fostered their reverence for him and yet had avoided the teacher's duties. Under the ordinary conditions of life he had been a good enough friend: but when Lloyd was in a state of perplexity, bordering upon derangement, Coleridge had held out no hand; and not even Lamb's desolate and hopeless state early in 1797 could, as we have seen, move him to write a letter, or in 1798 help to excuse such offence as Coleridge conceived him to have committed. When he deemed himself aggrieved, the Religious Muser could be as self-indulgent in the matter of anger as anybody else. To object is, of course, to set too high an ideal before that frail giant S. T. C. Yet he had taught every one with whom he came in contact to expect so much more from himself than from ordinary mortals, that his defection became peculiarly noticeable and distressing. It was his unhappy destiny always to fail at the last moment.

The final letter in the quarrel was written by Lamb, just before Coleridge's departure for Germany with the Wordsworths in August, 1798. Its inspiration was a remark of Coleridge's, of course repeated to Lamb—“Poor Lamb, if he wants any knowledge, he may apply to me”—a sentence for which, considering what it produced, we must be eternally grateful! Lamb hastened to reply to Coleridge with the following series of very pointed personal problems:—



## THESES QUÆDAM THEOLOGICÆ

1. Whether God loves a lying Angel better than a true Man?
2. Whether the Archangel Uriel *could* affirm an untruth? and if he *could* whether he *would*?
3. Whether Honesty be an angelic virtue? or not rather to be reckoned among those qualities which the Schoolmen term "*Virtutes minus splendidæ et terræ et hominis particeps*"?
4. Whether the higher order of Seraphim Illuminati ever sneer?
5. Whether pure intelligences can love?
6. Whether the Seraphim Ardentes do not manifest their virtues by the way of vision and theory? and whether practice be not a sub-celestial and merely human virtue?
7. Whether the Vision Beatific be anything more or less than a perpetual representment to each individual Angel of his own present attainments and future capabilities, somehow in the manner of mortal looking-glasses, reflecting a perpetual complacency and self-satisfaction?
- 8 and last. Whether an immortal and amenable soul may not come to be damned at last, and the man never suspect it beforehand?

*Learned Sir, my Friend,*

Presuming on our long habits of friendship and emboldened further by your late liberal permission to avail myself of your correspondence, in case I want any knowledge, (which I intend to do when I have no Encyclopædia or Lady's Magazine at hand to refer to in any matter of science,) I now submit to your enquiries the above Theological Propositions, to be by you defended, or oppugned, or both, in the Schools of Germany, whither I am told you are departing, to the utter dissatisfaction of your native Devonshire and regret of universal England; but to my own individual consolation if thro the channel of your wished return, Learned Sir, my Friend, may be transmitted to this our Island, from those famous Theological Wits of Leipsic and Gottingen, any rays of illumination, in vain to be derived from the home growth of our English Halls and Colleges. Finally, wishing Learned Sir, that you may see Schiller and swing in a wood (*vide* Poems) and sit upon a Tun, and eat fat hams of Westphalia,

I remain, your friend and docile Pupil to instruct

CHARLES LAMB.

With this letter Coleridge drops out of the correspondence until 1800. It was the only difference that Lamb and he ever had, and it was never absolutely forgotten. Although the quarrel was made up, the two men were never quite on their old terms. Coleridge, to Lamb, was no longer an archangel, but an "archangel a little damaged." Lamb did not love him less, but knew him better.

Lamb rarely alluded to the matter in after years. In a letter to Coleridge in 1820, he said of Lloyd: "He almost alienated you also from me, or me from you, I don't know which; but that breach is closed." (In the same letter Lamb charged Lloyd with the complete alienation of one regretted friend, but does not say who, nor can he now be identified.) And again, in the dedication of Lamb's *Works* to Coleridge, in 1818, we have this: "My friend Lloyd and myself came into our first battle (authorship is a sort of warfare) under cover of the greater Ajax. How this association, which shall always be a dear and proud recollection to me, came to be broken,—who snapped the threefold cord,—whether yourself (but I know that was not the case) grew ashamed of your former companions,—or whether (which is by much the more probable) some ungracious bookseller was author of the separation,—I cannot tell."

But let us forget this unhappy business. Let us rather remember that in a little note on the death of Coleridge Lamb wrote, "He was my fifty-year old friend without a dissension;" and that earlier in the same year, 1834, Coleridge had written in pencil in his *Poetical Works*, against the poem, "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison" (written in 1797): "*Ch. and Mary Lamb—dear to my heart, yea, as it were, my heart. S. T. C. Aet. 63, 1834. 1797-1834 = 37 years!*"

And here we practically take leave of Charles Lloyd, whom also Lamb was getting to know better. We shall catch glimpses of him from time to time, but when he left London in the spring or summer of 1798, he passed out of Lamb's life, and Coleridge's, for ever. Two unimportant notes from Lamb to Lloyd are all that remain of what must have been a large correspondence; but the bulk of it was probably, almost certainly, anterior to the summer of 1798. Lloyd's later years were chequered by disease and melancholy, from which he emerged now and then into literary activity. In 1821, during a longer interval than usual, he

published *Desultory Thoughts in London*, which contains some interesting stanzas describing his old friends and poetical associates. Of Coleridge he wrote :—

One near thee, London, dwells, to whom I fain  
Tribute would pay, or ere this lay I close ;  
Yet how can I—ungifted with a strain  
Fit to arrest the ear of him who knows  
To build such verse as Seraphim might deign  
To listen to, nor break the deep repose  
Of those immortal ardours that inspire  
Spirit of the inextinguishable fire—

How shall I fitly speak on such a theme ?  
He is a treasure by the world neglected,  
Because he hath not, with a prescience dim,  
Like those whose every aim is self-reflected,  
Pil'd up some fastuous trophy, that of him  
Might tell, what mighty powers the age rejected,  
But taught his lips the office of a *pen*—  
By fools he's deem'd a being lost to men. . . .

No! Those who most have seen me, since the hour  
When thou and I, in former happier days,  
Frank converse held, though many an adverse power  
Have sought the memory of those times to raze,  
Can vouch that more it stirs me (thus a tower,  
Sole remnant of vast castle, still betrays  
Haply its former splendour) to have prov'd  
Thy love, than by fresh friends to have been lov'd.

I have had comrades both for weal and *woe* ;  
I have had compeers both for good and *ill* ;  
But thou'rt the only one I e'er did know  
Who sufferdst such a breeze life's sails to fill,  
That all the *scath* I from the *last* did know,  
Thou metamorphosedst, with wizard's skill,  
Into a course more blithe, though not less sure :  
And *Wisdom's* smile, in *thee*, had folly's lure.

And of Lamb :—

He walk'd along his path in steadiness,  
In solitude, and in sublimity ;  
None ever knew his desolate distress,  
And none shall ever know it now from me.  
But with a love, temper'd with awfulness,  
Have I beheld the forc'd serenity,  
That, like envelope fine, on it he laid :  
Though 'twas transparent none dar'd pierce its shade.  
Oh —, thou art a mystery to me !  
Thou art so prudent, and so mad with wildness,  
Thou art a source of everlasting glee !  
Yet desolation of the very childless



Has been thy lot! Never in one like thee  
 Did I see worth majestic from its mildness;  
 So far, in thee, from being an annoyance  
 E'en to the vicious, 'tis a source of joyance.

Like a vast castle that has sieges seen,  
 Its outer walls shaken, and prostrate laid,  
 Thou seem'st to me! Each outlet to the scene,  
 Where thy great wealth, like troops in ambuscade,  
 Was stor'd, has oft been ransack'd; thou hast been  
 Of sympathy so frank, so overpaid  
 Their price to all! Yet much as thou'st been shaken  
 Thou, like that castle's fortress, ne'er wert taken.

No! thou, in many ways, reversest all,  
 That may to men in general be imputed,  
 Better in thee the virtues natural,  
 Than those in other men by culture rooted.  
 Never thy lips, by word, or great or small,  
 That other men could injure, were polluted.  
 Thy censure, if in critic chair thou sit,  
 Falls but on those too great to shrink from wit.

Before, however, leaving Lloyd and this period of Lamb's life, I must just refer to the publicity which was thrust upon Coleridge and his poetical friends through the medium of the *Anti-Jacobin*. In the last number of that paper, July 9th, 1798, in a satirical poem entitled "The New Morality," Canning wrote (with reference to the Theophilanthropist, Lepaux):—

And ye five other wandering Bards that move  
 In sweet accord of harmony and love,  
 C—DGE and S—TH—Y, L—D, and L—BE and Co.  
 Tune all your mystic harps to praise LEPAUX!

The *Anti-Jacobin* (I quote again from *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*) then disappeared in favour of the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, the first number of which—published on 1st August—was enriched by a coloured cartoon by Gillray, wherein the particular passage of "The New Morality" which described the worship of Lepaux received the emphasis of coloured illustration. In this picture, which is a fair specimen of Gillray's bludgeon-pencil, a crowd of the more prominent English revolutionists press forward to worship Justice, Philanthropy and Sensibility. Chief of them is the Duke of Bedford as Leviathan. Among the others is Colridge (the spelling is Gillray's) in the guise of a donkey, offering a volume of "Dactylics," and Southey, as another donkey, flourishing a volume of "Saphics." In Southey's pocket is a copy of "Joan of Arc." Behind, seated side by side, poring over a manuscript



entitled "Blank Verse, by Toad and Frog," are a toad and frog. These are marked in the key plan Lloyd and Lamb. No attempt at portraiture of any of the four was made by the artist, as the reproduction of the plate will show.

Coleridge and Southey may have been fair game for the satirist, but Lamb and Lloyd certainly were not. Coleridge and Southey had collaborated in "The Fall of Robespierre" (1794). Coleridge also had lectured at Bristol in 1795 on political questions, and had criticised Pitt with some severity; and these lectures, on being published under the titles "Conciones ad Populum" and "The Plot Discovered," had an addition by Southey. Coleridge also was a contributor to the *Morning Post*, and the friend of Citizen Thelwall, who, when he visited Stowey, was watched by a spy sent thither for the purpose by the Government. But Lamb and Lloyd's printed utterances were as far removed from Jacobinism as from bimetallism.

The Anti-Jacobins did not stop there. When placing Lloyd's luckless novel *Edmund Oliver* in the pillory they contrived to make Lamb share the punishment. Thus: "This Mr. Charles Lloyd we conceive to be one of the twin-bards who unite their impotent efforts to propagate their principles, which are alike marked by folly and by wickedness, in a kind of baby language which they are pleased to term *blank-verse*."

Subsequently, in a piece entitled "The Anarchists: an Ode"—an imitation of Collins's "Ode to the Passions"—which also appeared in the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, the luckless quartette were again castigated. Thus (the mighty dam being Anarchy):—

See! faithful to their mighty dam,  
 C . . . . DGE, S . . TH . Y, L . . . D , and L . . BE,  
 In splay-foot madrigals of love,  
 Soft moaning like the widow'd dove,  
 Pour, side by side, their sympathetic notes;  
     Of equal rights, and civic feasts,  
     And tyrant Kings, and knavish priests,  
 Swift through the land the tuneful mischief floats.  
     And now to softer strains they struck the lyre,  
     They sung the beetle, or the mole,  
     The dying kid, or ass's foal,  
 By cruel man permitted to expire.

And there the *Anti-Jacobin* attack ended.

Eleven years later, however, another satirist, the young and spirited author of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 1809, again grouped them. This time not Lepaux, but Wordsworth, was the alleged object of their adoration: Wordsworth,

Whose verse, of all but childish prattle void,  
Seems blessed harmony to Lamb and Lloyd.

His Lordship added in an explanatory footnote that "Messrs. Lamb and Lloyd" were "the most ignoble followers of Southey and Co."

Lloyd took the *Anti-Jacobin* attack with his customary seriousness, going so far as to indite a "Letter to *The Anti-Jacobin Reviewers*," which was printed in Birmingham in 1799. Therein he defended Lamb with some vigour: "The person you have thus leagued in a partnership of infamy with me is Mr. Charles Lamb, a man who, so far from being a democrat, would be the first person to assent to the opinions contained in the foregoing pages: he is a man too much occupied with real and painful duties—duties of high personal self-denial—to trouble himself about speculative matters."

Lamb made no public protest, but he did not forget his satirists. In 1802 he contributed to the *Morning Post* this epigram on Canning and Frere:—

At Eton School brought up with dull boys,  
We shone like *men* among the *school-boys*;  
But since we in the world have been,  
We are but *school-boys* among *men*;

and Canning also came in for some very hard hitting in Lamb's epigrams in the *Champion* many years later.

## CHAPTER XIII

1798 (*concluded*)

*Rosamund Gray*—Robert Lloyd—Correspondence with Southey—First Tidings of *John Woodvil*—Enter G. D. and fun.

ALTHOUGH there is extant no letter of Lamb's between January, 1798, and the summer of that year, we know something of his movements. We know him to have spent a fortnight very happily at Birmingham, probably at Lloyd's home, Bingley Hall, where he met others of the family: Charles Lloyd the elder, in whose translations from Homer and Horace he was afterwards to take an interest; Priscilla, who was to marry Christopher Wordsworth, the poet's brother; and possibly Robert, whom he had already seen in London and to whom he was destined to act as mentor and friend. Robert Lloyd, to whom we shall return later in the year, was at this time nineteen, apprenticed to a Quaker grocer and draper at Saffron Walden.

Much of the interval between January and the summer of 1798 Lamb spent in writing *Rosamund Gray*, which was published in the summer of 1798 by Lee & Hurst, under the title *A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret*, by Charles Lamb. As in almost everything that he wrote, early or late, the autobiographical character is strong, but it needs careful disentangling, particularly as at one time he narrates his own troubles in the person of Elinor Clare. We see him also as Allan Clare. Old Mrs. Field, Mary Lamb and Coleridge are probably in the story too, the scene of which is laid at Widford. When we remember Mary Lamb's condition at the time, it is impossible not to see Lamb's own feelings in the following extract from a letter from Elinor to Maria Beaumont:—

"Something will still be whispering to me, that I shall one day be inmate of the same dwelling with my cousin, partaker with her in all the delights, which

spring from mutual good offices, kind words, attentions in sickness and in health,—conversation, sometimes innocently trivial, and at others profitably serious ;—books read and commented on, together ; meals ate, and walks taken, together,—and conferences, how we may best do good to this poor person or that, and wean our spirits from the world's *cares*, without divesting ourselves of its *charities*. What a picture I have drawn, Maria!—and none of all these things may ever come to pass.”

Again, in the passage describing Elinor's father, we may, I fancy, see John Lamb in his later days, after Samuel Salt's death :—

“The gloom that beset his mind, at times betrayed him into scepticism—he has doubted if there be a Providence ! I have heard him say, ‘God has built a brave world, but methinks he has left his creatures to bustle in it *how they may*.’

“At such times he could not endure to hear my mother talk in a religious strain. He would say, ‘Woman, have done—you confound, you perplex me, when you talk of these matters, and for one day at least unfit me for the business of life.’

“I have seen her look at him—O GOD, Maria ! such a *look* ! it plainly spake that she was willing to have shared her precious hope with the partner of her earthly cares—but she found a repulse—

“Deprived of such a wife, think you, the old man could have long endured his existence ? or what consolation would his wretched daughter have had to offer him, but silent and imbecile tears ? ”

The story in itself is not quite convincing ; but its quality is of the rarest. The early chapters have an extraordinary charm of simplicity ; the later, a curious and painful intensity of feeling that cannot be dissociated in the reader's mind from the sense of a passionate personal grievance. As we read we are persuaded of the reality of Matravis—not so much that he ruined Rosamund, as that he existed fatefully and filled Lamb's mind. In the external form, and indeed in the tone of certain of the letters, there is little doubt but that Lamb was influenced by Mackenzie's gloomy epistolary novel, *Julie de Roubigné* ; but he borrowed no essentials. The circumstance that copies of *Rosamund Gray* are in existence bearing the imprint of Pearson of Birmingham leads to the supposition that it was during his visit to the Lloyds that either Lamb himself or Lloyd interested that bookseller in the book. I do not wish to exaggerate the merit of the story : had Lamb not written *Elia* probably *Rosamund Gray* would never have been reprinted in our own day ; but it has, I think, remarkable qualities and a very distinct and interesting strain of eeriness.

We find in the summer of 1798 two or three letters from



Lamb to Robert Lloyd, containing a maturity of counsel far beyond Lamb's age of twenty-three. Robert Lloyd seems to have been growing very restless under his employment, and also shaken in his faith. Perhaps Charles Lloyd was not free from blame in this matter, for when Robert was no more than sixteen, and should have been reading Smollett, that disturber of relationships had thus addressed him: "Do not give way to useless speculation. I advise you particularly to read Rousseau's 'Emilius,' in French if you can, and pray, out of regard to *Charles*, who now *earnestly entreats*, pay particular attention to the Savoyard vicar's confessions of faith, in the 2nd or 3rd vol. Get that book at all events. Do not attend to the intricacies of sectarian peculiarities; be a good man, retain a pure heart, but oh! avoid alike the Quaker and the Libertine, the Methodist and the Atheist."

In one of Lamb's letters of counsel to Robert Lloyd are some cautious remarks upon friendship which would not have been similarly worded, we may feel confident, had they been written before the break with Coleridge. There is almost an echo of Coleridge's letter which I have quoted in the previous chapter in these sentences: "I know you have chosen to take up an high opinion of my moral worth. But I say it before God, and I do not lie, you are mistaken in me. I could not bear to lay open all my failings to you, for the sentiment of shame would be too pungent. Let this be an example to you." Henceforward confidences formed no part of Lamb's friendships. His heart kept its own counsel. With the exception of his sister (and Miss Kelly) there is no record of any of his later friends penetrating much beyond his intellect.

Robert Lloyd was too young and too dependent to take Coleridge's place as a correspondent; and Charles Lloyd had disqualified himself. Into the breach stepped Southey, with whom Lamb carried on a steady literary correspondence at the end of 1798 and in the following year. At that time Southey was living at Burton, in Hampshire, busy with the *Annual Anthology* for Cottle, and writing his "English Eclogues" and other poems. He could not of course fill Coleridge's place, but he served as an intellectual stimulus to Lamb, leading him to the exercise of finer critical powers and to wider reading. The first letter of the series—dated July 28th—supplies Southey

with a copy of the Theses; the next discusses Wither and Quarles; the third commends Marlowe and gives signs that Lamb's best judgment is ripening. On November 8th Lamb puts Southey right as to the *Lyrical Ballads*, which had just been published by Cottle. "If you wrote that review in 'Crit. Rev.,' I am sorry you are so sparing of praise to the 'Ancient Marinere;'—so far from calling it, as you do, with some wit, but more severity, 'A Dutch Attempt,' &c., I call it a right English attempt, and a successful one, to dethrone German sublimity. You have selected a passage fertile in unmeaning miracles, but have passed by fifty passages as miraculous as the miracles they celebrate. I never so deeply felt the pathetic as in that part,

'A spring of love gush'd from my heart,  
And I bless'd them unaware—'

It stung me into high pleasure through sufferings. Lloyd does not like it; his head is too metaphysical, and your taste too correct; at least I must allege something against you both, to excuse my own dotage—

'So lonely 'twas, that God himself  
Scarce seem'd there to be!'—&c., &c.

But you allow some elaborate beauties—you should have extracted 'em. 'The Ancient Marinere' plays more tricks with the mind than that last poem ['Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey'], which is yet one of the finest written."

We have our first sight of *John Woodvil* (or "Pride's Cure" as it was then called) in the extract from its original form sent by Lamb both to Southey and to Robert Lloyd in November, 1798. In the same month he tells Southey: "My Tragedy will be a medley (as I intend it to be a medley) of laughter and tears, prose and verse, and in some places rhyme, songs, wit, pathos, humour, and, if possible, sublimity; at least, it is not a fault in my intention, if it does not comprehend most of these discordant colours. Heaven send they dance not the 'Dance of Death!'" Lamb adds, "I hear that the Two Noble Englishmen have parted no sooner than they set foot on German earth, but I have not heard the reason—possibly, to give novelists an handle to exclaim, 'Ah me! what things are perfect?'" The reference is to Wordsworth and Coleridge, who had gone to

Germany together, with Dorothy Wordsworth; but it is now considered very unlikely that the separation was due to any quarrel or misunderstanding.

The same letter, the last of any consequence in 1798, contains another reference to George Dyer. "I showed my 'Witch' and 'Dying Lover' [from *John Woodvil*] to Dyer last night; but George could not comprehend how that could be poetry which did not go upon ten feet. . . . George writes odes where the rhymes, like fashionable man and wife, keep a comfortable distance of six or eight lines apart, and calls that 'observing the laws of verse.' George tells you, before he recites, that you must listen with great attention, or you'll miss the rhymes. I did so, and found them pretty exact."

Now that Lloyd had left London and Coleridge was in Germany, James White and George Dyer must have been Lamb's principal friends. It is time to see what manner of man Dyer was.

## CHAPTER XIV

GEORGE DYER

LAMB conferred the patent of immortality on many of his friends; certainly on G. D. But for certain letters, and the two *Elia* essays "Oxford in the Vacation" and "Amicus Redivivus," George Dyer's name would now be unknown. As it is, we know more of him than of many of our living acquaintance.

The suggestion that Lamb and Dyer were at Christ's Hospital together is an error, for Dyer was twenty-seven when Lamb first entered its gates. He was born in 1755, the son of a watchman at Wapping, and his nomination for the Blue Coat School was obtained through some kindly ladies. There he remained from the age of seven to nineteen. Anthony Askew (1722-1772), classical scholar, and physician to Christ's Hospital, was interested in the boy, lent him books, and encouraged his Greek studies. Dyer, becoming a Grecian, left Christ's Hospital in 1774, two years after Askew's death, and passed to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he was a favourite with the master, the eccentric Richard Farmer, the friend of Askew, Parr and Dr. Johnson. It was while Dyer was at Cambridge that Farmer, then Vice-Chancellor, desiring the seal of the University from a member of the *Caput* who disapproved of a projected address to the King in support of the American policy of the Government, broke open his door with a sledge-hammer. Farmer loved above all things these three: old port, old books and old clothes; and in the second and third of his preferences, especially the third, his taste was followed loyally by his pupil. Dyer subsequently wrote the memoir of Farmer, as of many another man, for the *Annual Necrology*.

On taking his degree in 1778 Dyer became an usher in a



school at Dedham, that to which Lamb mistakingly refers in the first version of the essay "Oxford in the Vacation," in a passage afterwards suppressed: "D. commenced life, after a course of hard study in the 'House of pure Emanuel,' as usher to a knavish fanatic schoolmaster at —, at a salary of eight pounds per annum, with board and lodging. Of this poor stipend, he never received above half in all the laborious years he served this man. He tells a pleasant anecdote, that when poverty, staring out at his ragged knees, has sometimes compelled him, against the modesty of his nature, to hint at arrears, Dr. — would take no immediate notice, but, after supper, when the school was called together to even-song, he would never fail to introduce some instructive homily against riches, and the corruption of the heart occasioned through the desire of them—ending with 'Lord, keep thy servants, above all things, from the heinous sin of avarice. Having food and raiment, let us therewithal be content. Give me Agar's wish,'<sup>1</sup>—and the like;—which to the little auditory, sounded like a doctrine full of Christian prudence and simplicity,—but to poor D. was a receipt in full for that quarter's demand at least."

In the following simple and dignified and wholly admirable letter, in which Dyer went into the matter very fully, Lamb's pleasant story is denied. I take it from the memoir of Dyer in the thirty-eighth volume of the *Mirror of Literature*. It was written to Mr. William King in 1820:—

"DEAR SIR,—I return you the tenth Number of 'The London Magazine,' which but for your kindness, might not, perhaps, have fallen in my way. What Elia says relating to G. D., of Clifford's Inn, is very funny, and betrays no unkind intentions, and G. D. himself would have laughed at the humour, and must have blushed at the compliments, had he not been suddenly surprised at some remarks which made him both serious and sad.

"Elia, speaking of G. D.'s leaving the 'House of pure Emmanuel,' alluding, evidently, to a verse of a well-known old English ballad, beginning—

' In the House of pure Emmanuel,  
I had my education,'

says, '*he* commenced life as usher to a knavish fanatic schoolmaster at —, at a salary of five pounds a year, and that of this poor stipend he never received above half, in all the laborious years he served this man —.' He tells a

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<sup>1</sup> Should be Agar's wish. Proverbs xxx. 8, "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me."

pleasant anecdote 'when poverty, &c., compelled him to hint at arrears,' Dr. — took a certain course towards G. D., 'which was a receipt in full for that quarter's demand at least.' In answer to this, the gentlemen with whom G. D. was connected at schools are now deceased, but as there are others still living, who know under what circumstances these connexions were formed, they must consider the statement as illiberal and unjust. G. D. sends you the following counter-statement, every word of which you may be assured is strictly true.

"G. D. commenced life as usher to Dr. Grimwood, who kept a respectable academy at Dedham, in the county of Essex, where many of the principal gentry of the county were, and are still, educated, and many of the scholars of that academy have received the first honours at the universities. Dr. G. had been fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and the upper usher was, at the time, fellow of Sydney College, Cambridge; this latter place being pre-occupied, that of under usher fell, of course, to the lot of G. D., but had he continued, it is probable he would have succeeded to the upper usher's place; be that, however, as it may, his salary was so far from being what Elia describes it, that out of it he was enabled to give 20*l.* per annum to a most worthy person (his father), declining in years, who had every claim on his duty and affection. So far from Dr. Grimwood being in arrears during Dyer's stay with him, (which was only a twelvemonth,) he thinks that he received his full salary before it was due. It was a point of honour that led to his determination to leave; and when he did leave, (after a proposal from Dr. Grimwood to increase his salary if he would continue,) it was with much concern and affection on both sides; and the above gentleman made G. D. a present of five guineas over and above his salary. It was at this school that G. D. (to borrow Elia's expression) 'commenced life;' afterwards he became the inmate of the Rev. Dr. Ryland, who kept an academy at Northampton, on much lower terms, and consequently his ushers' salaries could not be very high; but D. was not properly in the full character of an usher here. All the said places were occupied; he was here a sort of supernumerary; it suited his convenience at the time to be there, and on the part of the Rev. Mr. R. it was an accommodation to the peculiar circumstances of G. D., who, if he did not in all things agree with this gentleman, found the situation very favourable to his own *prevailing pursuits*. It is true, he continued here much longer than it was at first intended by him, or than was expected by his part employer; but G. D. is not aware that he made any regular agreements on the score of salary, and indeed, for the *reasons* just alluded to, none such could have been made. It is true that D. might have looked for some remuneration, but the Rev. Mr. Ryland knew on what circumstances, and for what purposes, he came to him from the first; he knew that it had answered those purposes; he knew that he had studied that it should do so; he knew that he had pointed out to him his resources, and if G. D. had not availed himself of those resources so much as this good gentleman thought he did, that was certainly his own fault. Further, Mr. Ryland knew that G. D. had very kind and liberal friends. G. D. considers himself to this day as under great obligations to this gentleman, and whatever he may at any time have received from him was to be considered more as a gratuity than a salary. To speak the truth, D. was in this latter situation rather in the character of a student than an usher.

"The Rev. Mr. Ryland's terms for tuition were not only low, but his hand was apt to be liberal beyond his means; his peculiar situation as a very popular preacher in a particular line, rendered his academy a sort of open house 'to all

the vagrant train.' As to his ushers, they were commonly persons who had come to him under some peculiar difficulties, on whose gratitude he had even a claim; and if his own circumstances, for the reasons mentioned, did not allow him to give large salaries, it was understood they had enjoyed advantages under him, which were a full compensation for their services, so that some such prayer as 'Elia,' in his humorous way, alludes to, if even such had come from him, might have had in it something more just and good than Elia is aware of.

"The Rev. Dr. Ryland was a gentleman of very extensive reading, eccentric, certainly, if ever man was, both as a reader, an author, and a man; but his understanding possessed some strong features of character; his imagination would sometimes take no common flights; and some of his publications bear evidently these marks of his eccentricities; and with the singular boldness of his remarks, every one who was acquainted with him was well aware; and it is not improbable that even G. D. may, in some unguarded moment, have made a slight allusion to them; and this, perhaps, Elia may have worked up in his farcical, poetical narrative. But you perceive, Sir, in reference to Dr. Grimwood, where he says D. 'commenced life,' not a word can be true. As to Dr. Ryland, D. recollects a circumstance which he will here mention: A certain spark was once making himself merry with some of his peculiar sayings, when he was interrupted by the Rev. Robert Robinson, (whose life I have published,) and who was himself a truly great man; 'Sir, let me tell you, if you take away eleven parts out of twelve from Dr. Ryland, there will still be left a greater man than yourself.' This, however, is not here mentioned as being applicable to Elia; by no means. Elia is unquestionably a great wit, and may be a great man; but he is certainly a very different man from the spark alluded to. There are some other remarks in the witty Elia's communication to the 'London Magazine,' relative to G. D., (without *malice prepense* on his part,) calculated to do mischief. Elia describes 'G. D.' as under-working for himself, 'drudging at low rates.' Is this said out of mere fun, or to excite pity towards poor 'D.'? If the latter, he should know that pity is often a poor consoler, and very frequently a bad friend. As he comically describes himself 'a votary of the desk, a notched, and cropt scrivener,' or, as he most probably is, a brother of the quill, in another sense, even what is called an author, he should know that under-workers are not considered by brother workmen as dealing fairly by the craft, and are too likely to be frustrated in their undertakings.

"Excuse the length and tediousness of this letter, and believe me, Dear Sir, yours, most sincerely,

"G. DYER."

Lamb also had something further to say on the subject some years later. Writing to Dyer in 1831 he says: "You never penned a line which for its own sake you need (dying) wish to blot. You mistake your heart if you think you *can* write a lampoon. Your whips are rods of roses. Your spleen has ever had for its objects vices, not the vicious—abstract offences, not the concrete sinner. But you are sensitive, and wince as much at the consciousness of having committed a compliment, as another



man would at the perpetration of an affront. But do not lug me into the same soreness of conscience with yourself. I maintain, and will to the last hour, that I never writ of you but *con amore*. That if any allusion was made to your near-sightedness, it was not for the purpose of mocking an infirmity, but of connecting it with scholar-like habits: for is it not erudite and scholarly to be somewhat near of sight, before age naturally brings on the malady? You could not then plead the *obrepens senectus*. Did I not moreover make it an apology for a certain *absence*, which some of your friends may have experienced, when you have not on a sudden made recognition of them in a casual street-meeting, and did I not strengthen your excuse for this slowness of recognition, by further accounting morally for the present engagement of your mind in worthy objects? Did I not, in your person, make the handsomest apology for absent-of-mind people that was ever made? If these things be not so, I never knew what I wrote or meant by my writing, and have been penning libels all my life without being aware of it."

Leaving Dedham, Dyer entered the family of Robert Robinson of Cambridge, the Baptist minister (who afterwards turned to Unitarianism). That valiant Dissenter was then living at Chester-ton with his numerous children, to whom G. D. was to act as tutor. At that time Dyer was fully intending to take orders, as all Grecians were expected to, but under Robinson's influence he too became a Unitarian and gave up his ecclesiastical projects. Robinson, a sensible and humorous man of strong individuality, died in 1790, leaving Dyer to edit his *History of Baptism* and his *Ecclesiastical Researches*, and then to write his life in 1796—a book which Wordsworth called one of the best biographies in the language. This work, which I have read, "discovers" (as Dyer would say) by no means a meek mind in its author, but a decisively opinionated one. Yet it seems to me to be a good book rather because Robinson was a strong and worthy man than because Dyer was an able biographer.

Change of faith having brought his intended career to an end, Dyer returned to teaching after Robinson's death, and it was then that he joined Dr. Ryland in a school at Northampton, where he had for a colleague John Clarke, father of Lamb's friend Charles Cowden Clarke. That was in 1791. While at Northampton, at the age of thirty-six, he knew, perhaps for the



first and last time, romance. Like Calverley's "Gemini," both G. D. and John Clarke loved the same lady, the Rev. Dr. Ryland's stepdaughter. Clarke won her, but the two rivals continued friends; and "many years after," writes Cowden Clarke, "when my father died, George Dyer asked for a private conference with me, told me of his youthful attachment for my mother, and inquired whether her circumstances were comfortable, because in case, as a widow, she had not been left well off he meant to offer her his hand. Hearing that in point of money she had no cause for concern, he begged me to keep secret what he had confided to me, and he himself never made farther allusion to the subject." I think that is one of the prettiest stories I know; and it lends emphasis to Hazlitt's remark of G. D. in his essay in 1821, "On the Look of a Gentleman" (Dyer being the common property of the essayists), that he was one of "God Almighty's gentlemen."

In 1792, making up his mind as to his true vocation, Dyer turned his steps to London, took those rooms in Clifford's Inn, the abode of lawyers, from which he never moved (dwelling, as Lamb said, "like a dove in an asp's nest"), and began his long career as a hack and the friend of letters and men of letters.

Dyer's principal work was scholarly or serious; but he had his lighter moments too, when he wrote verses, some of them quite sprightly, and moved socially from house to house. In the letter to Southey on page 143 we have seen something of George Dyer's attitude to poetry. The subject is continued in a letter to Wordsworth, some years later. "To G. D. a poem is a poem. His own as good as anybody's, and (God bless him!) anybody's as good as his own; for I do not think he has the most distant guess of the possibility of one poem being better than another. The gods, by denying him the very faculty itself of discrimination, have effectually cut off every seed of envy in his bosom. But with envy, they excised curiosity also; and if you wish the copy again, which you destined for him, I think I shall be able to find it again for you, on his third shelf, where he stuffs his presentation copies, uncut. . . ." Lamb adds that he recently gave Dyer his *Works*, and without any scruple rescued the copy after a little while and made it over to John Stoddart.

Dyer's principal verses are to be found in his *Poems*, 1800.

This book originally was to consist of two volumes, one containing poetry and the other criticism; but its author altered and changed his plan, and it was ultimately sent to the printers in one volume with sixty-eight pages of preface. And then occurred a tragedy, for just after the book was ready Dyer suddenly realised that he had committed himself in this preface to a principle in which he did not really believe. Lamb tells the story in a letter to Manning in December, 1800:—

“At length George Dyer’s phrenesis has come to a crisis; he is raging and furiously mad. I waited upon the heathen, Thursday was a se’nnight; the first symptom which struck my eye and gave me incontrovertible proof of the fatal truth was a pair of nankeen pantaloons four times too big for him, which the said Heathen did pertinaciously affirm to be new.

“They were absolutely ingrained with the accumulated dirt of ages; but he affirmed them to be clean. He was going to visit a lady that was nice about those things, and that’s the reason he wore nankeen that day. And then he danced, and capered, and fidgeted, and pulled up his pantaloons, and hugged his intolerable flannel vestment closer about his poetic loins; anon he gave it loose to the zephyrs which plentifully insinuate their tiny bodies through every crevice, door, window or wainscot, expressly formed for the exclusion of such impertinents. Then he caught at a proof sheet, and caught up a laundress’s bill instead—made a dart at Blomfield’s Poems, and threw them in agony aside. I could not bring him to one direct reply; he could not maintain his jumping mind in a right line for the tithe of a moment by Clifford’s Inn clock. He must go to the printer’s immediately—the most unlucky accident—he had struck off five hundred impressions of his Poems, which were ready for delivery to subscribers, and the Preface must all be expunged. There were eighty pages of Preface, and not till that morning had he discovered that in the very first page of said Preface he had set out with a principle of Criticism fundamentally wrong, which vitiated all his following reasoning. The Preface must be expunged, although it cost him £30—the lowest calculation, taking in paper and printing! In vain have his real friends remonstrated against this Midsummer madness. George is as obstinate as a Primitive Christian—and wards and parries off all our thrusts with one unanswerable

fence ;—‘ Sir, it’s of great consequence that the *world* is not misled ! ’ ”

A few months later George Dyer’s phrenesis came to a head again. Lamb told the story to Rickman, to whom Dyer had introduced him, in a letter of which, in the part appertaining to Dyer, I cannot bring myself to curtail a syllable. “ I wish I could convey to you any notion of the whimsical scenes I have been witness to in this fortnight past. ’Twas on Tuesday week the poor heathen scrambled up to my door about breakfast time. He came thro’ a violent rain with no neckcloth on, and a *beard* that made him a spectacle to men and angels, and tap’d at the door. Mary open’d it, and he stood stark still and held a paper in his hand importing that he had been ill with a fever. He either wouldn’t or couldn’t speak except by signs. When you went to comfort him he put his hand upon his heart, and shook his head, and told us his complaint lay where no medicines could reach it. I was dispatch’d for Dr. Dale, Mr. Phillips of St. Paul’s Church yard and Mr. Frend who is to be his executor. George solemnly delivered into Mr. Frend’s hands and mine an old burnt preface that had been in the fire, with injunctions, which we solemnly vow’d to obey, that it should be printed after his death with his last corrections, and that some account should be given to the world why he had not fulfill’d his engagement with subscribers. Having done this and borrow’d two guineas of his bookseller (to whom he imparted in confidence that he should leave a great many loose papers behind him which would only want methodizing and arranging to prove very lucrative to any bookseller after his death) he laid himself down on my bed in a mood of complacent resignation.

“ By the aid of meat and drink put into him (for I all along suspected a vacuum) he was enabled to sit up in the evening, but he had not got the better of his intolerable fear of dying ; he expressed such philosophic indifference in his speech and such frightened apprehensions in his physiognomy that if he had truly been dying and I had known it I could not have kept my countenance. In particular when the doctor came and ordered him to take little white powders (I suppose of chalk or alum to humour him) he ey’d him with a *suspicion* which I could not account for ; he has since explain’d that he took it for granted Dr. Dale knew his situation and had ordered him these powders



to hasten his departure that he might suffer as little pain as possible. Think what an aspect the heathen put on with these fears upon a dirty face.

“To recount all his freaks for two or three days while he thought he was going, and how the fit operated, and sometimes the man got uppermost and sometimes the author, and he had this excellent person to serve, and he must correct some proof sheets for Phillips, and he could not bear to leave his subscribers unsatisfy’d, but he must not think of these things now, he was going to a place where he should satisfy all his debts—and when he got a little better he began to discourse what a happy thing it would be if there was a place where all the good men and women in the world might meet, meaning heav’n, and I really believe for a time he had doubts about his soul, for he was very near, if not quite, light-headed. The fact was he had not had a good meal for some days, and his little dirty Neice (whom he sent for with a still dirtier Nephew, and hugg’d him; and bid them farewell) told us that unless he dines out he subsists on tea and gruels. And he corroborated this tale by ever and anon complaining of sensations of gnawing which he felt about his *heart*, which he mistook his stomach to be, and sure enough these gnawings were dissipated after a meal or two, and he surely thinks that he has been rescued from the jaws of death by Dr. Dale’s white powders.

“He is got quite well again by nursing, and chirps of odes and lyric poetry the day long—he is to go out of town on Monday, and with him goes the dirty train of his papers and books which follow’d him to our house. I shall not be sorry when he takes his nipt carcase out of my bed, which it has occupied, and vanishes with all his Lyric lumber, but I will endeavour to bring him in future into a method of dining at least once a day. I have proposed to him to dine with me—and he has nearly come into it whenever he does not go out—and pay me. I will take his money beforehand and he shall eat it out. If I don’t it will go all over the world. Some worthless relations, of which the dirty little devil that looks after him and a still more dirty nephew are component particles, I have reason to think divide all his gains with some lazy worthless authors that are his constant satellites. The Literary Fund has voted him seasonably £20, and if I can help it he shall spend it on his own carcase.



I have assisted him in arranging the remainder of what he calls Poems. . . .

“What do you think of a life of G. Dyer? I can scarcely conceive a more amusing novel. He has been connected with all sects in the world and he will faithfully tell all he knows. Every body will read it; and if it is not done according to my fancy, I promise to put him in a novel when he dies. Nothing shall escape *me*. If you think it feasible, whenever you write you may encourage him. Since he has been so close with me I have perceiv'd the workings of his inordinate vanity, his gigantic attention to particles and to prevent open vowels in his odes, his solicitude that the public may not lose any tittle of his poems by his death, and all the while his utter ignorance that the world don't care a pin about his odes and his criticisms, a fact which every body knows but himself—he *is a rum genius*.”

Lamb's idea of putting Dyer into a novel was not a new one. Writing to Coleridge in 1800 he had said: “George Dyer is the only literary character I am happily acquainted with. The oftener I see him, the more deeply I admire him. He is goodness itself. If I could but calculate the precise date of his death, I would write a novel on purpose to make George the hero. I could hit him off to a hair.” If only the novel had been written . . . ! But there could be nothing in it better than the letter to Rickman.

A letter to Rickman on November 24th, 1801, shows that Dyer was conforming to Lamb's plans for him: “Dyer regularly dines with me when he does not go a visiting—and brings his shilling. He has picked up amazingly. I never saw him happier. He has had his doors listed, and his casements puttied, and bought a handsome *screen* of the last century. Only his poems do not get finished. One volume is printing, but the second wants a good deal doing to it. I do not expect he will make much progress with his *Life and Opinions* till his detestable *Lyric Poetry* is delivered to subscribers. . . .

“He talks of marrying, but this *en passant* (as he says) and *entre nous*, for God's sake don't mention it to him, for he has not forgiven me for betraying to you his purpose of writing his own *Life*. He says, that if it once spreads, so many people will expect and wish to have a place in it, that he is sure he shall

disoblige all his friends." Dyer, it seems, did write his autobiography, but the MS. was lost.

The history of Dyer's unfortunate poetical project is, I think, worth telling with some precision. The first notification that I can find is in the *Monthly Magazine* for October, 1796, where this statement occurs:—

"Mr. George Dyer, with whose poetical talents the public are well acquainted, is preparing a course of publications—satires, odes, and elegies; two of which will shortly make their appearance, under the titles of *Poets' Fate* and *Poetic Sympathies*."

That was at the beginning of Lamb's acquaintance with G. D. Two years later, in November, 1798, the same magazine contained this announcement:—

"Mr. Dyer, in consequence of unforeseen engagements, and the advice of his friends, has been obliged to alter the plan of his Poetical Publication:—instead of three volumes at a guinea, two only, consisting of poems and poetical essays, will be published at twelve shillings. The first volume will appear next month."

Further delay occurred. No volumes, either at three for a guinea or two for twelve shillings, made their appearance; instead, in the *Monthly Magazine* for June, 1799, the following letter was printed:—

"G. Dyer presents respects to the subscribers to his poems, and informs them, with great concern, that the publication is delayed till the winter season. All the reasons of this delay could not with propriety be announced here, but shall be fully detailed in the preface to his poems. For the present, he must content himself with saying, that by unforeseen engagements, and by extending his plan beyond his original intention, he cannot get out the first volume, till the greater part of his subscribers will have left town for the summer; a time very inauspicious to publications of this nature. After mature deliberation, therefore, he thinks it most adviseable to print his two volumes at the same time; and his criticisms, extended as they are to an unexpected length, will form a distinct volume, comprehending free remarks on every species of poetry, and illustrations from the mythology of different nations. This arrangement, he apprehends, will less encumber the poems, and be more useful and agreeable to those persons for whose service this volume is intended. Such persons, however, as are not pleased with this arrangement may have their subscription-money returned, if they will have the goodness to apply to the bookseller where any subscription has been paid, or to the author himself, if the money was paid to him. Such other persons as choose to favour this work with their encouragement, are informed, that names are still received by the booksellers announced in his advertisement.

"*Clifford's Inn, May 20, 1799.*"

Dyer was now pledged to two volumes of poetry and preface, and we must suppose him actively engaged upon them thenceforward,

for in 1800 the first volume was ready. "Poems by George Dyer" was the simple title. It was the preface to this volume which, when 500 copies were printed, suddenly confronted its author with a fallacy that led to his phrenesis. The half-burnt cancelled preface (Lamb called Dyer "Cancellarius Major"), bound up with the *Poems*, 1801, and other works, from Lamb's shelves, is in the British Museum, where the curious may study it. "Snatch'd out of the fire" is Lamb's comment in the margin. I am entirely at a loss to discover what the fallacy is, for the first page is practically reproduced in its entirety in the revised preface of 1802. Nor does a comparison of the two prefaces otherwise yield any discrepancy amounting (to the best of my belief, but such researches are very difficult to make thoroughly,) to a false principle. The first omitted passage, on the second (not the first) page of the 1800 preface, is this:—

"A sufficient degree of generosity is found in the world to encourage a useful pursuit, and even an attempt to please: the violence of party cannot controul it; nor will it be overrated by the manœuverings of pride, or the feebleness of ignorance."

Can it be this benevolent opinion which poor G. D. discovered to be a fatal error?

The result at any rate was the suppression of the edition; surely one of those pacific acts of heroism which never receive recognition. Comic as the situation is—the flat, impossible poet declaring that the world must not be misled—it has its nobility, too, and very real pathos.

The luckless preface is very long and very discursive. It examines the nature of lyrical poetry, it analyses the poetic character, it exposes falsehoods told of Dyer by the critics and quidnuncs, it explains Dyer's attitude to his friends. One passage I must quote:—

"With regard to the ladies, whose names are mentioned in this or a former volume, let it be publicly understood, as it has always been privately, that my language has been the expression of simple, though sincere, respect. To a powerful affection, many years indulged, and to a fondness for retirement, I am certainly indebted for a revival of some poetical feelings: when the heart is most subdued, it sometimes loves to worship in silence. These feelings may, perhaps, since have broken out into verse; but while immediately under the influence of that softness, I made no rebuses, and sent about no poetical billets doux; a confession, it is true, not of a very gallant poet: but reasons present themselves for my acknowledging, that, in print, just enough is delivered to secure me from the imputation of insincerity, and no more. The mention of names may, perhaps, by some be considered imprudent; but the moral and



intellectual qualities that entitle one sex to respect or esteem, will, also, justly entitle the other: and where a writer acts not without reasons, and where, by the parties concerned, those reasons are not disapproved, there is no ground for censure."

The volume, without its preface, appeared again in 1801, and again publication was interrupted. At last, in 1802, the waiting world had the work—in two small volumes, with the original preface in much the same form, and the following explanation of the change of shape:—

"It was distantly suggested by friends, well qualified to have spoken with more freedom, that the undertaking to write *three* volumes of poems, and those mostly *lyrical*, would prove at once very arduous, and very unprofitable; and, that I had set myself no easy task, I could not be quite ignorant; well aware as I was, that through the whole range of poetry, no form required such frequent sacrifice to the graces, as what I was then attempting. The extent of the plan, also, was at least equal to the degree of elegance required in the treatment of the subject. In the ardour of my pursuit, the arts and sciences were made to pass in review before me. Statesmen, patriots, and heroes, poets, critics, and private friends, were each to receive some tribute of esteem, or some expressions of respect: and even amid these flights of fancy, critical remarks were intended on every branch of poetic composition. Thus extensive was the plan! So little do we know our weakness!"

Of Dyer's poetry there is little to say. It is just so many sober words in metre. His "Stanzas Meditated in the Cloisters of Christ's Hospital," from which Lamb quotes at the end of his first essay on the school (in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1813), is among his best poems. The farthest swing of his poetical pendulum in the other direction is perhaps the comic pæan, in the sapphic measure, in praise of snuff and tobacco, beginning:—

I've gōt th' hēad-āche: gīve mē thēn, bōy thē snūff-box,  
Fill'd with Hōare's bēst snūff, ā rēvivīng mixture,  
Bēst ōf all snūffs: thāt wīll rēlieve mē mōre than  
Strāsbūrgh ōr Hārdham's.

Ode VIII. in Book IV. of Dyer's *Poetics*, 1812, has a certain simple charm, but is chiefly interesting as exhibiting its author in nautical attire. I quote two stanzas:—

#### THE SAILOR

The author expresses grateful feelings to an honest landlady and her daughter, for kind attentions during his short stay with them near Hamilton, in Argyle-shire; but pleads against their solicitations for his longer continuance. He wore the dress of a Sailor at this time, and writes under that character.

My dame, you view a sailor brave,  
Hastening far hence to plough the seas,  
To quit for the rude boisterous wave,



The babbling bourn, the whispering trees :  
 The mavis calls ; the laverocks ring  
 Their music thro' the heav'ns so clear :  
 Nature's full chorus seems to sing,  
 Still, happy loiterer, linger here.  
 But, dame, you view a sailor brave,  
 And he must plough the ocean wave. . . .

Your Peggy's eye is dew-drop bright ;  
 Her smiling cheek is lily fair ;  
 Her feet as hare's move soft and light,\*  
 Her voice as blackbird's loud and clear :  
 Oh ! she goes near to wound my heart,  
 As oft she sings her "*Highland Laddie* :"  
 So quickly, dame, must I depart,  
 And keep my heart still tight and steady :  
 For, dame, you view a sailor brave ;  
 Quick he must plough the ocean wave.

Footnotes were a special weakness of Dyer's. Here is the last stanza, with its additaments, of a poem on "The Triumph of Poetry," in his *Poetics* :—

Oh ! might I view again, with ravish'd sight,  
 As when with candid Anderson<sup>1</sup> I stray'd,  
 And all the wonder-varying scene survey'd,  
 Sea, hills, and city fair, from Calton's<sup>2</sup> height ;  
 And hear, (for Scotland's rhimes, ah ! soon may fail<sup>3</sup>)  
 Some Ednam bard awake the trembling string ;<sup>4</sup>  
 Some tuneful youth<sup>5</sup> of charming Tiviotdale ;  
 Some Kelso songstress<sup>6</sup> love's dear raptures sing.  
 Language may fail, but love shall never die,  
 Till beauty fails to charm, till love forgets to sigh.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Robert Anderson, Editor of the Works of the British Poets, and author of a valuable Life of Dr. Smollet.

<sup>2</sup> Calton Hill, whence a view, at once romantic and sublime, is taken of the city of Edinburgh, of the Firth of Forth, and the hills of Fifeshire on the opposite coast.

<sup>3</sup> Such, at least, is the opinion of some judicious persons in Scotland.

<sup>4</sup> Ednam is near Kelso, in Berwickshire, near which the little river Eden flows, from which the village takes its name. Ednam is the native place of Thomson, the author of the *Seasons*.

<sup>5</sup> Alludes to a pedestrian tour made in this pastoral and truly classical country, and in some part of the north of England, with a gentleman of great talents, now eminently distinguished at Calcutta, for his extraordinary skill in the Asiatic languages. See an Essay on the Languages and Literature of the Indo-Chinese Nations, in Vol. X. of the ASIATIC RESEARCHES, by John Leyden, M.D.

<sup>6</sup> The Scotch melodies, sung to the Scotch airs, and by the female voice, constitutes, as must be supposed, one of the charms of this delightful country.

\* It is scarcely necessary to observe here, that an allusion is made to the *barefooted lasses* of Scotland :

"Here view *two barefoot beauties* clean and clear."

ALLAN RAMSAY'S "GENTLE SHEPHERD."

I wonder which of his poems Dyer read to the other patients at Dr. Graham's earth-bath establishment (as he did when he was being treated there), his audience, like himself, being half-buried in the garden, all around him? What a picture!

Best among Dyer's prose works were his *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson* and his *History of the University and Colleges of Cambridge*. He wrote, moreover, countless articles, reviews and biographies for periodicals, pamphlets on religious questions, and "all that was original" in James Valpy's edition of the classics, in 141 volumes, 1809-1831. He also travelled from library to library collecting materials for a bibliographical work, which was never published. Dyer showed Hazlitt "with some triumph" two fingers of which he had lost the use in copying out manuscripts of Procrus and Plotinus in a fine Greek hand.

Mr. W. C. Hazlitt records that Miss Lamb and Mrs. Hazlitt once made a plan pleasantly to surprise Dyer by mending his arm-chair, which had a hundred holes in it. These they sewed up. Dyer's horror may be imagined when it is recorded that in every one of those gaping wounds he kept a book.

"He hangs," said Hazlitt, of Dyer, "like a film and cobweb upon letters, or like the dust on the outside of knowledge, which should not too rudely be brushed aside." And Lamb summed up his labours in the following words in "Oxford in the Vacation" in 1820: "D. has been under-working for himself ever since;—drudging at low rates for unappreciating booksellers,—wasting his fine erudition in silent corrections of the classics, and in those unostentatious but solid services to learning, which commonly fall to the lot of laborious scholars, who have not the art to sell themselves to the best advantage. . . . If his muse of kindness halt a little behind the strong lines, in fashion in this excitement-craving age, his prose is the best of the sort in the world, and exhibits a faithful transcript of his own healthy natural mind, and cheerful innocent tone of conversation."

The same essay contains Lamb's delightful account of meeting Dyer at Oxford (really at Cambridge), "grown almost into a book" among the books he loved so well. "D. started like an unbroke heifer, when I interrupted him. *A priori* it was not very probable that we should have met in Oriel. But D. would have done the same, had I accosted him on the sudden in his own walks in Clifford's-inn, or in the Temple. In addition to

a provoking short-sightedness (the effect of late studies and watchings at the midnight oil) D. is the most absent of men. He made a call the other morning at our friend *M.'s* [Basil Montagu's] in Bedford Square; and, finding nobody at home, was ushered into the hall, where, asking for pen and ink, with great exactitude of purpose he enters me his name in the book—which ordinarily lies about in such places, to record the failures of the untimely or unfortunate visitor—and takes his leave with many ceremonies, and professions of regret. Some two or three hours after, his walking destinies returned him into the same neighbourhood again, and again the quiet image of the fire-side circle at *M.'s*—Mrs. *M.* presiding at it like a Queen Lar, with pretty *A. S.* [Ann Skepper, afterwards Mrs. B. W. Procter] at her side—striking irresistibly on his fancy, he makes another call (forgetting that they were ‘certainly not to return from the country before that day week’) and disappointed a second time, inquires for pen and paper as before: again the book is brought, and in the line just above that in which he is about to print his second name (his re-script)—his first name (scarce dry) looks out upon him like another Sosia, or as if a man should suddenly encounter his own duplicate!—The effect may be conceived. D. made many a good resolution against any such lapses in future. I hope he will not keep them too rigorously.

“For with G. D.—to be absent from the body, is sometimes (not to speak it profanely) to be present with the Lord. At the very time when, personally encountering thee, he passes on with no recognition—or, being stopped, starts like a thing surprised—at that moment, reader, he is on Mount Tabor—or Parnassus—or co-sphered with Plato—or, with Harrington, framing ‘immortal commonwealths’—devising some plan of amelioration to thy country, or thy species—peradventure meditating some individual kindness or courtesy, to be done to *thee thyself*, the returning consciousness of which made him to start so guiltily at thy obtruded personal presence. . . .

“D. is delightful any where, but he is at the best in such places as these. He cares not much for Bath. He is out of his element at Buxton, at Scarborough, or Harrogate. The Cam and the Isis are to him ‘better than all the waters of Damascus.’ On the Muses’ hill he is happy, and good, as one of the Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains; and when he



goes about with you to show you the halls and colleges, you think you have with you the Interpreter at the House Beautiful."

It is upon neither his poetry nor his prose but upon this passage and one other in Lamb's essays that George Dyer's title to fame reposes. One other in particular: for the achievement of his life, the deed by which he is known and will be known throughout the ages, is his involuntary dip in the New River in 1823. The story is told in the *Elia* essay "Amicus Redivivus":—

"I do not know when I have experienced a stranger sensation, than on seeing my old friend G. D., who had been paying me a morning visit a few Sundays back, at my cottage at Islington, upon taking leave, instead of turning down the right hand path by which he had entered—with staff in hand, and at noon day, deliberately march right forwards into the midst of the stream that runs by us, and totally disappear.

"A spectacle like this at dusk would have been appalling enough; but, in the broad open daylight, to witness such an unreserved motion towards self-destruction in a valued friend, took from me all power of speculation.

"How I found my feet, I know not. Consciousness was quite gone. Some spirit, not my own, whirled me to the spot. I remember nothing but the silvery apparition of a good white head emerging; nigh which a staff (the hand unseen that wielded it) pointed upwards, as feeling for the skies. In a moment (if time was in that time) he was on my shoulders, and I—frighted with a load more precious than his who bore Anchises. . . .

"It was pleasant to observe the effect of the subsiding alarm upon the nerves of the dear absentee. It seemed to have given a shake to memory, calling up notice after notice, of all the providential deliverances he had experienced in the course of his long and innocent life. Sitting up in my couch—my couch which, naked and void of furniture hitherto, for the salutary repose which it administered, shall be honoured with costly valance, at some price, and henceforth be a state-bed at Colebrook,—he discoursed of marvellous escapes—by carelessness of nurses—by pails of gelid, and kettles of the boiling element, in infancy—by orchard pranks, and snapping twigs, in schoolboy frolics—by descent of tiles at Trumpington, and of heavier tomes at Pembroke—by studious watchings, inducing frightful vigilance—by want, and the fear of want, and all the sore



throbbings of the learned head.—Anon, he would burst out into little fragments of chaunting—of songs long ago—ends of deliverance-hymns, not remembered before since childhood, but coming up now, when his heart was made tender as a child's—for the *tremor cordis*, in the retrospect of a recent deliverance, as in a case of impending danger, acting upon an innocent heart, will produce a self-tenderness, which we should do ill to christen cowardice; and Shakspeare, in the latter crisis, has made his good Sir Hugh to remember the sitting by Babylon, and to mutter of shallow rivers. . . .

“Had he been drowned in Cam there would have been some consonancy in it; but what willows had ye to wave and rustle over his moist sepulture?—or, having no *name*, besides that unmeaning assumption of *eternal novelty*, did ye think to get one by the noble prize, and henceforth to be termed the STREAM DYERIAN?

And could such spacious virtue find a grave  
Beneath the imposthumed bubble of a wave?

“I protest, George, you shall not venture out again—no, not by daylight—without a sufficient pair of spectacles—in your musing moods especially. Your absence of mind we have borne, till your presence of body came to be called in question by it. You shall not go wandering into Euripus with Aristotle, if we can help it. Fie, man, to turn dipper at your years, after your many tracts in favour of sprinkling only!

“I have nothing but water in my head o' nights since this frightful accident. Sometimes I am with Clarence in his dream. At others, I behold Christian beginning to sink, and crying out to his good brother Hopeful (that is to me), ‘I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head, all the waves go over me. Selah.’ Then I have before me Palinurus, just letting go the steerage. I cry out too late to save. Next follow—a mournful procession—*suicidal faces*, saved against their wills from drowning; dolefully trailing a length of reluctant gratefulness, with ropy weeds pendant from locks of watchet hue—constrained Lazari—Pluto's half-subjects—stolen fees from the grave—bilking Charon of his fare. At their head Arion—or is it G. D.?—in his singing garments marcheth singly, with harp in hand, and votive garland, which Machaon (or Dr. Hawes) snatcheth straight, intending to suspend it to the stern God of

Sea. Then follow dismal streams of Lethe, in which the half-drenched on earth are constrained to drown downright, by wharfs where Ophelia twice acts her muddy death.

“And, doubtless, there is some notice in that invisible world, when one of us approacheth (as my friend did so lately) to their inexorable precincts. When a soul knocks once, twice, at death’s door, the sensation aroused within the palace must be considerable; and the grim Feature, by modern science so often dispossessed of his prey, must have learned by this time to pity Tantalus.

“A pulse assuredly was felt along the line of the Elysian shades, when the near arrival of G. D. was announced by no equivocal indications. From their seats of Asphodel arose the gentler and the graver ghosts—poet, or historian—of Grecian or of Roman lore—to crown with unfading chaplets the half-finished love-labours of their unwearied scholiast. Him Markland expected—him Tyrwhitt hoped to encounter—him the sweet lyrist of Peter House, whom he had barely seen upon earth, with newest airs prepared to greet —; and, patron of the gentle Christ’s boy,—who should have been his patron through life—the mild Askew, with longing aspirations, leaned foremost from his venerable Æsculapian chair, to welcome into that happy company the matured virtues of the man, whose tender scions in the boy he himself upon earth had so prophetically fed and watered.” There we see Dyer vicariously making exquisite and imperishable literature. Our debt to G. D.’s short sight is very great. Lamb, however, I ought perhaps to say, stretches a point when he makes himself a witness of the immersion. He did not return until Dyer was in bed.

Of that absence of mind of which the above passages give an example, all Dyer’s friends have spoken. Edmund Ollier, in his reminiscences of Lamb, tells as good a story as any. “Once, when Dyer had been spending the evening at Leigh Hunt’s house on Hampstead Heath, he came back a quarter of an hour after leaving, when the family had gone up to their bedrooms. ‘What is the matter?’ asked Hunt. ‘I think, sir,’ said Dyer, in his simpering, apologetic way, ‘I think I have left one of my shoes behind me.’ He had indeed shuffled it off under the table and did not discover his loss until he had gone a long way.” At a breakfast party, described by Procter, Dyer omitted the tea.

On the omission being pointed out he set it right by emptying a paper of ginger into the teapot. His guest affected to make a meal, but, as soon as he decently could, said good-bye and hurried to a coffee-tavern for something to satisfy his hunger. He was just finishing a capital breakfast when Dyer came in, either to read the paper or to inquire after an acquaintance who frequented the house. Recognising his guest, he asked him how he did; but he had entirely forgotten their previous meeting and expressed no surprise at seeing him devouring a second breakfast. (It was in reference to Dyer's economies, Procter adds, that Lamb re-christened his dog. Dyer had a dog whose name was Tobit; Lamb called him No-bit.) The story of Procter's adventure was elaborately worked up by Leigh Hunt in the sketch in *Men, Women and Books* called "Jack Abbot's Breakfast" where Dyer figures as Goodall. Hunt's description of him ends thus: "In a word, he was a sort of better-bred Dominie Sampson—a Goldsmith, with the genius taken out of him, but the goodness left—an angel of the dusty heaven of bookstalls and the British Museum."

Among other stories of Dyer's absence of mind is that told by Mrs. Le Breton, in her *Memories of Seventy Years*, of his taking up a coalscuttle in place of his hat; while on another occasion he walked off with a footman's cockaded hat and did not discover the mistake until some one commiserated with him on his fall in fortune.

Talfourd's description of George Dyer mentions his "gaunt, awkward form, set off by trousers too short . . . and a rusty coat as much too large for the wearer . . . ; his long head silvered over with short yet straggling hair, and his dark grey eyes." One or two of the inventions with which Lamb caused those eyes to glisten in faith and amazement are given in Talfourd's narrative, as when he told him in strict confidence that Castlereagh had confessed to the authorship of the *Waverley* Novels. Talfourd records also the perfect reply made by Dyer to Lamb's question, put to him to test his kindness of heart, as to what he thought of the terrible Williams, the Ratcliffe Highway murderer (made immortal by De Quincey), who had first destroyed two families and then committed suicide. After a sufficient pause for consideration the answer came: "I should think, Mr. Lamb, he must have been rather an eccentric character."



Dyer, poor enough for many years of his life, was possessed of a sufficiency in his later years. The beginning of his good fortune was his inclusion among the ten executors and residuary legatees of the third Lord Stanhope, "Citizen Stanhope," who died in 1816; George Dyer having at one time acted as tutor in his family. Mrs. Barbauld, a friend of Dyer, was of opinion that Stanhope must have been insane, and Dyer himself was, says Crabb Robinson, one of the first to declare that he rejected the legacy and renounced the executorship; but the heir insisted on granting him a small annuity, and this, added to another which Dyer's friends had settled upon him, made his declining years quite comfortable. It was probably just after Stanhope's death that Lamb, as Talfourd tells us, inquired gravely of Dyer if it were true, as commonly reported, that he was to be made a lord. "O dear no, Mr. Lamb, I couldn't think of such a thing; it is not true, I assure you." "I thought not," said Lamb, "and I contradict it wherever I go; but the Government will not ask your consent; they may raise you to the peerage without your ever knowing it." "I hope not, Mr. Lamb, indeed, indeed, I hope not; it would not suit me at all." Leigh Hunt tells us that Dyer was one of the little trusting company whom Lamb sent to Primrose Hill at daybreak to watch the Persian ambassador worshipping the sun. Though he made fun of Dyer's oddities, Lamb admired him and loved him always. "God never put a kinder heart into flesh of man than George Dyer's" he once said.

George Dyer's odd manner of talking has been realistically preserved for us by Charles Cowden Clarke, in *Recollections of Writers*. "He had a trick of filling up his hesitating sentences with a mild little monosyllabic sound, and of finishing his speeches with the incomplete phrase, 'Well, sir; but however——'. This peculiarity we used to amuse ourselves by imitating when we talked of him and recalled his oddities, as thus:—'You have met with a curious and rare book, you say? Indeed, sir; abd—abd—abd—perhaps you would allow me to look at it; abd—abd—abd— Well, sir; but however——' Or: 'You have been ill, sir, I hear. Dear me! abd—abd—abd—I'm sorry, I'm sure; abd—abd—abd— Well, sir; but however——' Once when he came to see us he told us of his having lately spent some time among a wandering tribe of Gipsies, he feeling much





GEORGE DYER (AGED 40)

FROM A PORTRAIT BY J. CRISTALI, IN THE *COLLEZIONE BIOGRAFICA*



desire to know something of the language and habits of this interesting race of people, and believing he could not do so better than by joining them in one of their rambling expeditions."

Dyer had loved once, as we have seen; he loved also the widow of Gilbert Wakefield, and even dared to propose to her, much (as Mrs. Le Breton, her niece, tells us) to her indignation. It was long before he was forgiven. At last his gentle celibacy was to be ended: on May 3rd, 1824, at St. Dunstan's Church, he was married to Honour Mather, a widow three-deep, who had inherited from her third husband chambers opposite Dyer, and who had been happily inspired to suggest that he should accept her as wife and guardian. Dyer, who hitherto had lived at No. 13, now moved to No. 14, her rooms, never to leave them. The marriage was fortunate, G. D.'s only regret being expressed in a remark once made to Crabb Robinson, "Mrs. Dyer is a woman of excellent natural sense, but she is not literate." A charming account of the marriage is given by Mrs. Augustus De Morgan, born Sophia Frend, a daughter of Dyer's counsellor, William Frend, of Cambridge. Mrs. De Morgan writes, in her *Memoirs of Augustus De Morgan*: "Late in life a tide came in his affairs. A kind woman, the widow of a solicitor, who owned the chambers opposite to his, watched him going in and out, and saw his quiet, harmless ways. As she afterwards said in her Devonshire dialect, she 'couldn't abear to see the peure gentleman so neglected.' So she made acquaintance with him, invited him across the Inn, and gave him tea and hot cakes and muffins 'comfortable.' At one of these entertainments when the guest was expressing his satisfaction and thankfulness, she observed:—

"'Yes, Mr. Dyer, sir, you du want some one to look after you.'

"'The rejoinder was ready: 'Will you be that one?'

"'Well, sir, I don't say but what I've thought of it; but you must speak to your friends, and let me see them, and if Mr. Frend approves——'

"So my father was informed of the proposal, and in some alarm went to meet the intended victim at the chambers of the 'designing widow,' who had already 'buried' three husbands. His views of the case were soon altered. She was so simple, so open, and so evidently kindhearted, that, after examining and comparing all circumstances, he thought that his old friend's

happiness would be secured by the marriage. It took place shortly afterwards in St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet Street.

"When the newly married pair came to visit us at Stoke Newington, we who were in doubt as to what we were to expect were pleased to find her a sensible, kindly-hearted woman, who had made of our neglected old friend a fine-looking, well-dressed elderly man, beaming with kindness and happiness."

Another story of Dyer which Mrs. De Morgan tells illustrates Friend's sense of mischief as well as the old scholar's mildness: "At one period of his life—I fancy before he went as a sizar to Emmanuel College—Dyer was a Baptist Minister. I have seen his consternation and alarm when thus reminded of his ministrations by my father.

"Wm. Friend: 'You know, Dyer, that was before you drowned the woman.'

"G. Dyer: '*I never drowned any woman!*'

"Wm. Friend: 'You have forgotten.' To the company generally: 'Dyer had taken the woman's hand and made her dip in the water; he then pronounced the blessing and left her there.'

"G. Dyer (troubled): 'No, no; you are joking. It could not be.'

Lamb wrote the following lines to William Friend:—

Friend of the friendless, friend of all mankind,  
To thy wide friendships I have not been blind;  
But looking at them nearly, in the end  
I love thee most that thou art Dyer's Friend,

Cowden Clarke, writing of Dyer's marriage, says: "It was great gratification to us to see how the old student's rusty suit of black, threadbare and shining with the shabbiness of neglect, the limp wisp of jaconet muslin, yellow with age, round his throat, the dusty shoes, and stubbly beard, had become exchanged for a coat that shone only with the lustre of regular brushing, a snow-white cravat neatly tied on, brightly blacked shoes, and a close-shaven chin—the whole man presenting a cosy and burnished appearance, like one carefully and affectionately tended. He, like Charles Lamb, always wore black smalls, black stockings (which Charles Lamb generally covered with high black gaiters) and black shoes; the knee-smalls and the shoes both being tied with strings instead of fastened with



buckles. His hair, white and stiff, glossy at the time now spoken of from due administration of comb and brush, contrasted strongly with a pair of small dark eyes, worn with much poring over Greek and black-letter characters; while even at an advanced age there was a sweet look of kindness, simple goodness, serenity, and almost childlike guilelessness that characteristically marked his face at all periods of his life."

In Dyer's last years Crabb Robinson used to read to him occasionally on Sunday morning; but his customary help in this way came from a poor man who rendered the service for sixpence an hour. G. D. died on March 2nd, 1841, aged eighty-six all but a fortnight. William Frend was ill at the same time, dying on February 21st. The news of his death was kept from Dyer for some days, and Mrs. De Morgan's beautiful account of George Dyer's last moments makes the end of the two friends synchronise. "During his last illness poor George Dyer sent up daily to inquire after him. When the messenger came back for the last time, he asked for the news, and was told he was rather better. 'I understand,' he said; 'Mr. Frend is dead. Lay me beside him.' He then went into an adjoining room, washed his hands, returned, and quietly sat down in his armchair, as it was thought, to listen to a kind friend (Miss Matilda Betham) who came to read to him. Before beginning she looked up to her hearer, but the loving-hearted old man was dead."

George Dyer's widow survived him for twenty years. She died in May, 1861, in her hundred-and-first year. Crabb Robinson called on her in August, 1860, when "she spoke in warm praise of Charles and Mary Lamb."

## CHAPTER XV

1799

Robert Lloyd at Pentonville—The Death of Mr. Lamb—Old Dorrell—Mary Lamb with Her Brother Again—"Old China"—Early Excursions—Book-Buying—Brother and Sister at the Play—Thomas Manning—Mock Latin—The Lambs' Finances.

IN the first letter of 1799, dated January 21st, Lamb tells Southey a startling piece of news. "Robert [Lloyd] (the flower of his family) hath eloped from the persecutions of his father, and has taken shelter with me. What the issue of his adventure will be, I know not. He hath the sweetness of an angel in his heart, combined with admirable firmness of purpose: an uncultivated, but very original, and, I think, superior genius." A week or so later Lamb writes again: "Robert still continues here with me, his father has proposed nothing, but would willingly lure him back with fair professions. But Robert is endowed with a wise fortitude, and in this business has acted quite from himself, and wisely acted. His parents must come forward in the End. I like reducing parents to a sense of un-dutifulness. I like confounding the relations of life."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of Lamb's more serious letters to Robert Lloyd shows that he could be on the side of the parents too. Robert Lloyd had objected to attend the Quakers' meeting; his father wished him to. Lamb writes: "I decidedly consider your refusal as a breach of that God-descended precept—Honour and observe thy parents in all lawful things. Silent worship cannot be *Unlawful*; there is no Idolatry, no invocation of saints, no bowing before the consecrated wafer in all this, nothing which a wise man would refuse, or a good man fear to do. What is it? Sitting a few hours in a week with certain good people who call *that* worship. You subscribe to no articles—if your mind wanders, it is no crime in you who do not give credit to these infusions of the spirit. They sit in a temple, you sit as in a room adjoining, only do not disturb their pious work with gabbling, nor your own necessary peace with heart-burnings at your not ill-meaning parents, nor a silly contempt of the work which is going on before

Exactly what had happened we do not know ; but the Lloyds were in great trouble at the time, owing partly to the illness of Priscilla, and I suspect that Robert, in the midst of it, announced his intention of taking to literature as a profession, and that his father very properly opposed it. How long he remained at Pentonville I cannot discover, but in June we find his sister Priscilla addressing him at Bath : "Lamb would not I think by any means be a person to take up your abode with. He is too much like yourself—he would encourage those feelings which it certainly is your duty to suppress. Your station in life—the duties which are pointed out by that rank in society which you are destined to fulfil—differ widely from his." "Charles," Priscilla added, "wishes you to call on Southey at Bristol frequently." Robert Lloyd's unsettlement was ultimately brought to an end by the purchase for him by his father of a partnership in a bookselling and printing business in Birmingham.

Between March and October, 1799, there are no letters, but two very important events occurred in the interval: the death of Lamb's father, and the consequent return of Mary Lamb to make her home with her brother. Of John Lamb's peevish state in his last days we have already seen something; his son tells more in the essay on the Old Benchers of the Inner Temple. "I saw him in his old age and the decay of his faculties, palsy-smitten, in the last sad stage of human weakness—'a remnant most forlorn of what he was,'—yet even then his eye would light up upon the mention of his favourite Garrick. He was greatest, he would say, in Bayes—'was upon the stage nearly throughout the whole performance, and as busy as a bee.' At intervals, too, he would speak of his former life, and how he came up a little boy from Lincoln to go to service, and how his mother cried at parting with him, and how he returned, after some few years' absence, in his smart new livery to see her, and she blessed herself at the change, and could hardly be brought to believe that it was 'her own bairn.' And then, the excitement subsiding, he would weep, till I have wished that sad

you. I know that if my parents were to live again, I would do more things to please them than merely sitting still six hours in a week. Perhaps I enlarge too much on this affair, but indeed your objection seems to me ridiculous, and involving in it a principle of frivolous and vexatious resistance."

second-childhood might have a mother still to lay its head upon her lap. But the common mother of us all in no long time after received him gently into hers."

John Lamb died in April, and was buried at St. Andrew's, Holborn, on April 13th, 1799. His will is a very simple one, leaving to his wife everything with the exception of the two small bequests to his sisters mentioned on page 19. Elizabeth Lamb having predeceased him, the will was proved by John Lamb and Charles Lamb, on May 7th, 1799.

The witnesses to the will when it was made in 1761, nearly fourteen years before Charles was born, were William Dorrell and Hannah Halstead; and here we have a clue to the name Dorrell, which twice occurs mysteriously in Lamb's writings. In the essay "New Year's Eve," written in 1820, he says: "It was better that our family should have missed that legacy, which old Dorrell cheated us of, than that I should have at this moment two thousand pounds *in banco*, and be without the idea of that specious old rogue." And again, in the verses "Gone or Going," written in 1827, from which I have already quoted—a series of recollections of very early friends and acquaintances—we find these stanzas upon "wicked old Dorrel ('gainst whom I've a quarrel)":—

Had he mended in right time,  
He need not in night time,  
(That black hour, and fright-time,)  
Till sexton interr'd him,  
Have groan'd in his coffin,  
While demons stood scoffing—  
You'd ha' thought him a-coughing—  
My own father<sup>1</sup> heard him!

Could gain so importune,  
With occasion opportune,  
That for a poor Fortune,  
That should have been ours.<sup>2</sup>  
In soul he should venture  
To pierce the dim center,  
Where will-forgers enter  
Amid the dark Powers.—

<sup>1</sup> Who sat up with him.

<sup>2</sup> I have this fact from Parental tradition only.



Precisely what Dorrell did we cannot tell; his offence is probably among the things that will never be made clear.

I imagine that it was immediately after his father's death that Lamb moved from 45 Chapel Street, Pentonville, to No. 36, in the same street, where his sister joined him and where they lived together until the spring of 1800. It would be particularly to this period that Mary Lamb refers (as Bridget Elia) in the essay "Old China," since she speaks there of her and her brother's old life in Islington, and No. 36 Chapel Street was as near Islington as could be; although it is of course possible and even probable that certain later experiences were blended in her reminiscences. "I wish the good old times would come again," she said, 'when we were not quite so rich. I do not mean, that I want to be poor; but there was a middle state;'—so she was pleased to ramble on,—'in which I am sure we were a great deal happier. A purchase is but a purchase, now that you have money enough and to spare. Formerly it used to be a triumph. When we coveted a cheap luxury (and, O! how much ado I had to get you to consent in those times!) we were used to have a debate two or three days before, and to weigh the *for* and *against*, and think what we might spare it out of, and what saving we could hit upon, that should be an equivalent. A thing was worth buying then, when we felt the money that we paid for it.

"Do you remember the brown suit, which you made to hang upon you, till all your friends cried shame upon you, it grew so thread-bare—and all because of that folio Beaumont and Fletcher, which you dragged home late at night from Barker's in Covent-garden? Do you remember how we eyed it for weeks before we could make up our minds to the purchase, and had not come to a determination till it was near ten o'clock of the Saturday night, when you set off from Islington, fearing you should be too late—and when the old bookseller with some grumbling opened his shop, and by the twinkling taper (for he was setting bed-wards) lighted out the relic from his dusty treasures—and when you lugged it home, wishing it were twice as cumbersome—and when you presented it to me—and when we were exploring the perfectness of it (*collating*, you called it)—and while I was repairing some of the loose leaves with paste, which your impatience would not suffer to be left till day-break—was there no

pleasure in being a poor man? or can those neat black clothes which you wear now, and are so careful to keep brushed, since we have become rich and finical, give you half the honest vanity, with which you flaunted it about in that over-worn suit—your old corbeau—for four or five weeks longer than you should have done, to pacify your conscience for the mighty sum of fifteen—or sixteen shillings, was it?—a great affair we thought it then—which you had lavished on the old folio. Now you can afford to buy any book that pleases you, but I do not see that you ever bring me home any nice old purchases now.

““When you came home with twenty apologies for laying out a less number of shillings upon that print after Lionardo, which we christened the “Lady Blanch;” when you looked at the purchase, and thought of the money—and thought of the money, and looked again at the picture—was there no pleasure in being a poor man? Now, you have nothing to do but to walk into Colnaghi’s, and buy a wilderness of Lionardos. Yet do you?”

““Then, do you remember our pleasant walks to Enfield, and Potter’s Bar, and Waltham, when we had a holyday—holydays, and all other fun, are gone, now we are rich—and the little hand-basket in which I used to deposit our day’s fare of savory cold lamb and salad—and how you would pry about at noon-tide for some decent house, where we might go in, and produce our store—only paying for the ale that you must call for—and speculate upon the looks of the landlady, and whether she was likely to allow us a table-cloth—and wish for such another honest hostess, as Izaak Walton has described many a one on the pleasant banks of the Lea, when he went a fishing—and sometimes they would prove obliging enough, and sometimes they would look grudgingly upon us—but we had cheerful looks still for one another, and would eat our plain food savorily, scarcely grudging Piscator his Trout Hall? Now, when we go out a day’s pleasuring, which is seldom moreover, we *ride* part of the way—and go into a fine inn, and order the best of dinners, never debating the expense—which, after all, never has half the relish of those chance country snaps, when we were at the mercy of uncertain usage, and a precarious welcome.

““You are too proud to see a play anywhere now but in the

pit. Do you remember where it was we used to sit, when we saw the battle of Hexham, and the surrender of Calais, and Bannister and Mrs. Bland in the *Children in the Wood*—when we squeezed out our shillings a-piece to sit three or four times in a season in the one-shilling gallery—where you felt all the time that you ought not to have brought me—and more strongly I felt obligation to you for having brought me—and the pleasure was the better for a little shame—and when the curtain drew up, what cared we for our place in the house, or what mattered it where we were sitting, when our thoughts were with *Rosalind in Arden*, or with *Viola at the Court of Illyria*? You used to say, that the gallery was the best place of all for enjoying a play socially—that the relish of such exhibitions must be in proportion to the infrequency of going—that the company we met there, not being in general readers of plays, were obliged to attend the more, and did attend, to what was going on, on the stage—because a word lost would have been a chasm, which it was impossible for them to fill up. With such reflections we consoled our pride then—and I appeal to you, whether, as a woman, I met generally with less attention and accommodation, than I have done since in more expensive situations in the house? The getting in indeed, and the crowding up those inconvenient staircases, was bad enough,—but there was still a law of civility to women recognised to quite as great an extent as we ever found in the other passages—and how a little difficulty overcome heightened the snug seat, and the play, afterwards! Now we can only pay our money, and walk in. You cannot see, you say, in the galleries now. I am sure we saw, and heard too, well enough then—but sight, and all, I think, is gone with our poverty.”

It is, I imagine, of this 36 Chapel Street period that Barry Cornwall writes in his *Memoir of Lamb*: “Whenever the approach of one of her [Mary Lamb’s] fits of insanity was announced, by some irritability or change of manner, Lamb would take her, under his arm, to Hoxton Asylum. It was very affecting to encounter the young brother and his sister walking together (weeping together) on this painful errand; Mary herself, although sad, very conscious of the necessity for temporary separation from her only friend. They used to carry a strait jacket with them.” Charles Lloyd told Talfourd that once he



met them thus together, in tears.<sup>1</sup> Later, as Lamb's finances improved, Mary Lamb was cared for privately when ill, either at home or with a nurse elsewhere.

The correspondence opens again with a letter to Southey dated October 31st, 1799, in which Lamb says that he has just returned from spending some red letter-days at Widford: "I could tell of a *wilderness*, and of a village church, and where the bones of my honoured grandam lie; but there are feelings which refuse to be translated, sulky aborigines, which will not be naturalised in another soil. Of this nature are old family faces and scenes of infancy."

The correspondence is continued by an unpublished letter to Charles Lloyd, in which Lamb asks for the return of his play, as John Philip Kemble has offered to place it in the hands of the proprietor of Drury Lane, and Lamb therefore wishes to have a second copy in the house. We thus hear of the first of several attempts to get on terms with the stage, an ambition which Lamb cherished in vain all his life.

The letter is valuable also in first introducing the name of a new friend, Thomas Manning, who was destined to have a strong influence on Lamb's character; and incidentally also it gives news of Coleridge, who, returned from Germany, had settled at 21 Buckingham Street, Strand (to be near the *Morning Post*), where his wife and Hartley joined him early in December. Charles Lloyd, I might add, having married Sophia Pemberton (without the assistance of Southey or the blacksmith of Gretna Green), was now settled in lodgings in Jesus Lane, Cambridge,

<sup>1</sup> It was on hearing of this incident that Valentine Le Grice, in 1849, wrote the following poem:—

An angel's wing is waving o'er their head,  
While they, the brother and sister walk;  
Nor dare, as heedless of its fanning, talk  
Of woes which are not buried with the dead.

Hand clasped in hand they move: adown their cheek  
From the full heart-spring, tears o'erflowing gush;  
Close and more close they clasp, as if to speak  
Would wake the sorrows which they seek to hush.

Down to the mansion slow their footsteps tend,  
Where blank despair is soothed by mercy's spell;  
Pausing in momentary pray'r to bend,  
Ere the cheered sister passes to her cell.

Strong in the hope that yet there will be given  
Calm and sweet hours—foretastes [to them] of heaven.



with his wife, bent upon completing his irregular education; which he was doing partly with the assistance of Manning. In the absence of dates, I am presuming that this letter to Lloyd precedes Lamb's first letter to Manning; but the point is immaterial.

Thomas Manning, to whom Lamb had been presented on a recent visit to the Lloyds, and in whom he had at once detected a congenial spirit, was twenty-seven in November, 1799; Lamb would be twenty-five in the following February. He was the son of the rector of Diss, in Norfolk, and might possibly have gone into the Church had he not objected to oaths and tests. As it was, he did not take his degree, but after ceasing to be an undergraduate of Caius, remained at Cambridge as a tutor of mathematics, in which capacity he met Lloyd. Among his friends were Porson, Baron Maseres, and Tuthill the physician, who became also a friend of the Lambs. We shall see much of Manning from time to time in the next few years; meanwhile it is enough to say that he was the most considerable man that Lamb had come to know well since he left school. Particularly at this period was it useful for him to have a friend of such fine intelligence and humour; the time was ripe. Coleridge for a while was lost; White was merely a droll; Charles Lloyd was morbid and dangerous; Robert Lloyd was dependent and unformed. In Manning Lamb found reserves of strength and an intellect with stuff to it.

Lamb wrote of Manning always in superlatives. To Robert Lloyd, "I believe I told you I have been to see *Manning*. He is a dainty chiel.—A man of great Power—an enchanter almost.—Far beyond Coleridge or any man in power of impressing—when he gets you alone, he can act the wonders of Egypt. Only he is lazy, and does not always put forth all his strength; if he did, I know no man of genius at all comparable to him." And to Coleridge (a quarter of a century later), "I am glad you esteem Manning, though you see but his husk or shrine. He discloses not, save to select worshippers, and will leave the world without any one hardly but me knowing how stupendous a creature he is." Unfortunately Manning's power—like that of dead actors—remains a matter of hearsay. He has left no work to prove it; while his familiar letters to Lamb contain curiously few signs either of humour or of profundity of thought.

Lamb's words, however, carry conviction ; and this is fortified by the excellence of the letters which Manning drew from Lamb. Manning was a talker, and many talkers are very poor writers. He seems also to have had something of the actor's gifts, for Lamb more than once insists upon the wonder of his grimaces.

In later life Manning became serious, more eccentric and not a little embittered ; but I have seen certain documents proving that his sense of fun and nonsense was quick in those early days. One sheet is covered with mock titles for sensational stories, in which Lamb may have had a hand : the best is "The Corpse with the Long Nails." Another sheet is given up to mock Latin. I copy three sentences, with translation :—

Notae formae missarum. No tea for me, Miss Sarum.

Narre et formare. Nor yet for Mary.

Narre et fornicat. Nor yet for my cat.

(Lamb, as we know, also experimented alone in this form of humour ; in a manuscript volume compiled by William Ayrton and lettered "Lamb's Works, Vol. III.," uniform with the two volumes of the *Works*, 1818, are several examples in the same manner. One evening, as I conjecture, Ayrton and others had written at random certain English sentences, which Lamb had undertaken to turn into mock Latin. Thus, against "I read Steele, Addison, a bit of Farquhar. I detest Hervey, I mean his morality," Lamb has written : "Ire des tela da sonabit o far qua ridet est arva Hymen his moralite.")

Largely under the stimulus of Manning's personality, Lamb, whose "scribbling days were past," as he told that friend in his first letter to him in December, 1799, wrote in 1800 more letters than in any year of his life until 1823. The Manning-inspired correspondence of 1800 is, moreover, of greater interest than that of any one later year, both intrinsically and because it marks the beginnings of Lamb as we know him best—the authentic Lamb, shrewd, humorous, independent, balanced between fun and seriousness, puns and wisdom. The saddest part of his life was over ; the tragedy was three years behind him ; his sister, often in good health, was restored to him ; Manning's ready, sympathetic laugh was always in the background ; Coleridge was once again in London, accessible whenever the impulse came to seek him ; and other new friends were being added to the circle.



THOMAS MANNING

AFTER A PAINTING IN THE POSSESSION OF THE REV. G. C. MANNING OF DISS





The Lambs were not rich—£90, with some small additions for overtime and holidays, was the salary in 1800—but there must have been something from the father's estate, enough at any rate to put them beyond want. Charles's salary thenceforward rose by £10 every two years until 1815, when, as we shall see, it became suddenly much larger. From the beginning of the century he was also in receipt of an annual gratuity which began at £30 and rose steadily. There was furthermore a holiday allowance of £10, and extra work was paid for. When once a clerk had been long enough in the office to partake of all the privileges, he was in a favourable financial position.

These figures, I hope, make it clear that the picture that has sometimes been drawn of Lamb as always "a poor clerk" should be effaced. Lamb had never been poor in any extreme sense, had never had to do more than practise economy, short of much self-denial; while from 1800 onward he was a stranger to any real anxiety from monetary causes, although there were, in the next few years, occasions when a slightly larger income would have been welcome.

## CHAPTER XVI

1800

William Godwin—"Toad or Frog"—Coleridge at 36 Chapel Street—An Evening with Blue-stockings—Home in London Once More—Mary Lamb's First Poem—John Rickman—*John Woodvil* Again—Lamb and London—"Antonio"—John Philip Kemble—The Cambridge Itinerary.

WITH the first letter of 1800 Lamb's correspondence with Coleridge reopens. "I expect," says Lamb, "Manning of Cambridge in town to-night—will you fulfil your promise of meeting him at my house? He is a man of a thousand. Give me a line to say what day, whether Saturday, Sunday, Monday, &c., and if Sara and the Philosopher can come. I am afraid if I did not at intervals call upon you, I should *never see you*. But I forget, the affairs of the nation engross your time and your mind." The Philosopher was Hartley Coleridge, aged three, and the "affairs of the nation" is a reference to Coleridge's work as leader writer on the *Morning Post*.

On February 13th Lamb tells Manning of a new friend—William Godwin. "Godwin I am a good deal pleased with. He is a very well-behaved, decent man, nothing very brilliant about him, or imposing, as you may suppose; quite another guess sort of gentleman from what your Anti-Jacobin Christians imagine him. I was well pleased to find he has neither horns nor claws; quite a tame creature, I assure you. A middle-sized man, both in stature and in understanding; whereas, from his noisy fame, you would expect to find a Briareus Centimanus or a Tityus tall enough to pull Jupiter from his heavens."

Southey tells us that Coleridge brought Lamb and Godwin together shortly after the first number of the *Anti-Jacobin Magazine and Review* was published, containing the caricature by Gillray, which we have seen, depicting Lloyd and Lamb as toad and frog. The date, however, must have been January



or February, 1800, for Coleridge was not in London in August, 1798, nor on terms with Lamb. Southey continues, "Lamb got warmed with whatever was on the table, became disputatious, and said things to Godwin which made him quietly say, 'Pray, Mr. Lamb, are you toad or frog?' Mrs. Coleridge will remember the scene, which was to her sufficiently uncomfortable. But the next morning S. T. C. called on Lamb, and found Godwin breakfasting with him, from which time their intimacy began." In a letter to Joseph Cottle, March 13th, 1797, Southey says: "As for Godwin himself, he has large noble eyes, and a nose—oh, most abominable nose! Language is not vituperative enough to describe the effect of its downward elongation."

In March, 1800, William Godwin would be forty-four, Lamb's senior by nineteen years; his *Political Justice* had appeared in 1793, *Caleb Williams* in 1794, and *St. Leon* in 1799. His wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, had died in 1797, leaving him with two infant daughters: one his own (afterwards Mrs. Shelley), a mere baby, and one Imlay's, known as Fanny Godwin. He was living in the Polygon, Somer's Town, and was meditating his tragedy of "Antonio," to which we shall shortly come. Lamb and Godwin were never close friends, but they knew each other's worth, and Godwin, as we shall see, made literary suggestions to Lamb and his sister but for which the world might have lost the *Tales from Shakespear* and *Mrs. Leicester's School*.

The letter to Manning of March 17th, 1800, has news. "I am living in a continuous feast. Coleridge has been with me now for nigh three weeks, and the more I see of him in the quotidian undress and relaxation of his mind, the more cause I see to love him, and believe him a *very good man*, and all those foolish impressions to the contrary fly off like morning slumbers. He is engaged in translations, which I hope will keep him this month to come. He is uncommonly kind and friendly to me. He ferrets me day and night, to *do something*. He tends me, amidst all his own worrying and heart-oppressing occupations, as a gardener tends his young *tulip*. Marry come up! what a pretty similitude, and how like your humble servant! He has lugged me to the brink of engaging to a newspaper, and has suggested to me for a first plan the forgery of a supposed manuscript of Burton the anatomist of melancholy. I have even written the introductory letter; and, if

I can pick up a few guineas this way, I feel they will be most *refreshing*, bread being so dear." Coleridge, having left the *Morning Post* in February, and sent his family to Bristol, had joined the Lambs at Pentonville, where he was busy on his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* (for which Lamb wrote an admirable version of "Thekla's Song" from the literal prose supplied by Coleridge, which, however, was not used in the text). Exactly when Coleridge left the Lambs cannot be determined; our next sight of him is at Grasmere on April 21st.

Lamb's reference to newspaper work brings us to his first inauspicious attempt to form a connection with the *Morning Post*. The editor, Daniel Stuart, a very shrewd Scotsman, was Coleridge's friend and a brother-in-law of Sir James Mackintosh. Lamb seems to have tried him with several articles, all much too literary, without result. The records are not very clear, but I doubt if Lamb succeeded in getting anything into the *Post* until the end of 1801. The imitations of Burton which Stuart refused (with, speaking journalistically, good reason) are, after the dedication to *Falstaff's Letters* and *Rosamund Gray*, the earliest specimens of Lamb's prose that exist, and, although not calculated to "strike a bliss" upon a morning paper, are as ingenious and entertaining a parody of the Anatomist of Melancholy as one could ask; and something more too, for never, I think, has an imitator been more successful than was Lamb in conveying both the manner and matter of his original. They are almost Burton himself; which is very extraordinary when one reflects that Burton was an ancient scholar of the early seventeenth century and Lamb a young clerk at the dawn of the nineteenth.

In April Lamb sends Coleridge a manuscript copy of his play (still under consideration at Drury Lane) which is to be presented to Wordsworth and his sister; and he then describes, with a humour until now lacking in the letters, but henceforward to be a characteristic of them, an evening among Blue-stockings. Coleridge, it seems, had become acquainted with Sarah Wesley (1760-1828), the daughter of Charles Wesley and niece of John and Samuel Wesley, a lady who mixed in literary society; Miss Wesley had a friend named Elizabeth Ogilvy Benger (1778-1827), who knew Mrs. Barbauld and Mrs. Inchbald (whom Lamb called the two bald women), wrote a

biography of John Tobin, the dramatist, and was described by Madame de Staël as the most interesting woman she had met in England; and Miss Benger found her way to 36 Chapel Street, probably in the hope of finding Coleridge there. Here is Lamb's story: "You encouraged that mopsey, Miss Wesley, to dance after you, in the hope of having her nonsense put into a nonsensical Anthology. We have pretty well shaken her off, by that simple expedient of referring her to you; but there are more burrs in the wind. I came home t'other day from business, hungry as a hunter, to dinner, with nothing, I am sure, of *the author but hunger* about me, and whom found I closeted with Mary but a friend of this Miss Wesley, one Miss Benje, or Benjey—I don't know how she spells her name. I just came in time enough, I believe, luckily to prevent them from exchanging vows of eternal friendship. It seems she is one of your authoresses, that you first foster, and then upbraid us with. But I forgive you. 'The rogue has given me potions to make me love him.' Well; go she would not, nor step a step over our threshold, till we had promised to come and drink tea with her next night. I had never seen her before, and could not tell who the devil it was that was so familiar.

"We went, however, not to be impolite. Her lodgings are up two pairs of stairs in East Street. Tea and coffee, and macaroons—a kind of cake I much love. We sat down. Presently Miss Benje broke the silence, by declaring herself quite of a different opinion from D'Israeli, who supposes the differences of human intellect to be the mere effect of organization. She begged to know my opinion. I attempted to carry it off with a pun upon organ; but that went off very flat. She immediately conceived a very low opinion of my metaphysics; and, turning round to Mary, put some question to her in French,—possibly having heard that neither Mary nor I understood French. The explanation that took place occasioned some embarrassment and much wondering. She then fell into an insulting conversation about the comparative genius and merits of all modern languages, and concluded with asserting that the Saxon was esteemed the purest dialect in Germany. From thence she passed into the subject of poetry; where I, who had hitherto sat mute and a hearer only, humbly hoped I might now put in a word to some advantage, seeing that it was my



own trade in a manner. But I was stopped by a round assertion, that no good poetry had appeared since Dr. Johnson's time. It seems the Doctor has suppressed many hopeful geniuses that way by the severity of his critical strictures in his 'Lives of the Poets.' I here ventured to question the fact, and was beginning to appeal to *names*, but I was assured 'it was certainly the case.'

"Then we discussed Miss More's book on education, which I had never read. It seems Dr. Gregory, another of Miss Benjey's friends, has found fault with one of Miss More's metaphors. Miss More has been at some pains to vindicate herself—in the opinion of Miss Benjey, not without success. It seems the Doctor is invariably against the use of broken or mixed metaphor, which he reprobates against the authority of Shakspeare himself. We next discussed the question, whether Pope was a poet? I find Dr. Gregory is of opinion he was not, though Miss Seward does not at all concur with him in this. We then sat upon the comparative merits of the ten translations of 'Pizarro,' and Miss Benjey or Benje advised Mary to take two of them home; she thought it might afford her some pleasure to compare them *verbatim*; which we declined. It being now nine o'clock, wine and macaroons were again served round, and we parted, with a promise to go again next week, and meet the Miss Porters,<sup>1</sup> who, it seems, have heard much of Mr. Coleridge, and wish to meet *us*, because we are *his* friends. I have been preparing for the occasion. I crowd cotton in my ears. I read all the reviews and magazines of the past month against the dreadful meeting, and I hope by these means to cut a tolerable second-rate figure."

The letter to Coleridge on May 12th tells only of trouble. Mary Lamb has been taken ill again and has gone away, and Hetty, the Lambs' servant, has died. The Chapel Street neighbours also have begun to look askance at the brother and sister. "My heart is quite sunk, and I don't know where to look for relief. Mary will get better again; but her constantly being liable to such relapses is dreadful; nor is it the least of our evils that her case and all our story is so well known around us. We are in a

<sup>1</sup> Jane and Anna Maria: later, authors respectively of *The Scottish Chiefs* and *The Hungarian Brothers*.

manner *marked*." On the same day Lamb tells Manning that he has given up his Pentonville house and is now looking for lodgings; meanwhile he is staying with James White, who has "all *kindness* but not *sympathy*." A letter from Coleridge to Godwin, dated May 21st, has this passage: "My poor Lamb! how cruelly afflictions crowd upon him! I am glad that you think of him as I think; he has an affectionate heart, a mind *sui generis*; his taste acts so as to appear like the unmechanic simplicity of an instinct—in brief he is worth an hundred men of mere talents. Conversation with the latter tribe is like the use of leaden bells—one warms by exercise; Lamb every now and then *irradiates*, and the beam, though single and fine as a hair, is yet rich with colours, and I both see and feel it."

A little later Lamb writes more cheerfully to Manning. "I am in much better spirits than when I wrote last. I have had a very eligible offer to lodge with a friend in town. He will have rooms to let at midsummer, by which time I hope my sister will be well enough to join me. It is a great object to me to live in town, where we shall be much more *private*. . . . We can be nowhere private except in the midst of London. We shall be in a family where we visit very frequently." The friend was John Mathew Gutch, a schoolfellow of Lamb and Coleridge, who was living at 27 Southampton Buildings, where he had a business as a law stationer. A letter to Coleridge in the early summer tells more of the new project, and shows Lamb and his sister at last settled together once more, and once more in the heart of London. "Soon after I wrote to you last, an offer was made me by Gutch (you must remember him? at Christ's—you saw him, slightly, one day with [Marmaduke] Thom[p]son at our house)—to come and lodge with him at his house in Southampton Buildings, Chancery-Lane. This was a very comfortable offer to me, the rooms being at a reasonable rent, and including the use of an old servant, besides being infinitely preferable to ordinary lodgings *in our case*, as you must perceive. As Gutch knew all our story and the perpetual liability to a recurrence in my sister's disorder, probably to the end of her life, I certainly think the offer very generous and very friendly. I have got three rooms (including servant) under £34 a year. Here I soon found myself at home; and here, in six weeks after, Mary was well enough to join me. So we are once more settled. . . . I

have passed two days at Oxford on a visit, which I have long put off, to Gutch's family. The sight of the Bodleian Library and, above all, a fine bust of Bishop Taylor at All Souls', were particularly gratifying to me; unluckily, it was not a family where I could take Mary with me, and I am afraid there is something of dishonesty in any pleasures I take without *her*. She never goes anywhere."

Passing over several letters about Coleridge's poetry and George Dyer's *Poems* (of which we know something already), we come to a pleasant missive to Coleridge on August 26th, which shows Mary Lamb in her first, or almost first, poetical flight—as the author of a charming little ballad rallying her brother on his affection for the lady in one of the Blakesware portraits. "How do you like this little epigram?" Lamb writes. "It is not my writing, nor had I any finger in it. If you concur with me in thinking it very elegant and very original, I shall be tempted to name the author to you. I will just hint that it is almost or quite a first attempt.

"HELEN REPENTANT TOO LATE

I

High-born Helen, round your dwelling  
 These twenty years I've paced in vain;  
 Haughty beauty, your lover's duty  
 Has been to glory in his pain.

2

High-born Helen! proudly telling  
 Stories of your cold disdain;  
 I starve, I die, now you comply,  
 And I no longer can complain.

3

These twenty years I've lived on tears,  
 Dwelling for ever on a frown;  
 On sighs I've fed, your scorn my bread;  
 I perish now you kind are grown.

4

Can I, who loved my Beloved  
 But for the 'scorn was in her eye,'  
 Can I be moved for my Beloved,  
 When she 'returns me sigh?'



## 5

In stately pride, by my bed-side,  
 High-born Helen's portrait's hung;  
 Deaf to my praise; my mournful lays  
 Are nightly to the portrait sung.

## 6

To that I weep, nor ever sleep,  
 Complaining all night long to her!  
*Helen, grown old, no longer cold,*  
 Said, 'You to all men I prefer.'

On October 9th Lamb sent to Coleridge one of the best of his early, or any of his, letters—a piece of pure comedy. “I suppose you have heard of the death of Amos Cottle. I paid a solemn visit of condolence to his brother, accompanied by George Dyer, of burlesque memory. I went, trembling to see poor Cottle so immediately upon the event. He was in black; and his younger brother was also in black. Everything wore an aspect suitable to the respect due to the freshly dead. For some time after our entrance nobody spake, till George modestly put in a question, whether *Alfred* was likely to sell. This was Lethe to Cottle, and his poor face, wet with tears, and his kind eye brightened up in a moment. Now I felt it was my cue to speak. I had to thank him for a present of a magnificent copy, and had promised to send him my remarks,—the least thing I could do; so I ventured to suggest, that I perceived a considerable improvement he had made in his first book since the state in which he first read it to me.

“Joseph, who till now had sat with his knees cowering in by the fireplace, wheeled about, and with great difficulty of body shifted the same round to the corner of a table where I was sitting, and first stationing one thigh over the other, which is his sedentary mood, and placidly fixing his benevolent face right against mine, waited my observations. At that moment it came strongly into my mind, that I had got Uncle Toby before me, he looked so kind and so good. I could not say an unkind thing of *Alfred*. So I set my memory to work to recollect what was the name of Alfred's Queen, and with some adroitness recalled the well-known sound to Cottle's ears of Alswitha. At that moment I could perceive that Cottle had forgot his brother was so lately become a blessed spirit. In the language of mathe-



maticians the author was as 9, the brother as 1. I felt my cue, and strong pity working at the root, I went to work, and beslobber'd *Alfred* with most unqualified praise, or only qualifying my praise by the occasional politic interposition of an exception taken against trivial faults, slips, and human imperfections, which, by removing the appearance of insincerity, did but in truth heighten the relish. Perhaps I might have spared that refinement, for Joseph was in a humour to hope and believe *all things*.

“What I said was beautifully supported, corroborated, and confirmed by the stupidity of his brother on my left hand, and by George on my right, who has an utter incapacity of comprehending that there can be anything bad in poetry. All poems are *good* poems to George; all men are *fine geniuses*. So what with my actual memory, of which I made the most, and Cottle's own helping me out, for I *really* had forgotten a good deal of *Alfred*, I made shift to discuss the most essential parts entirely to the satisfaction of its author, who repeatedly declared that he loved nothing better than *candid* criticism. Was I a candid grayhound now for all this? or did I do right? I believe I did. The effect was luscious to my conscience. For all the rest of the evening Amos was no more heard of, till George revived the subject by inquiring whether some account should not be drawn up by the friends of the deceased to be inserted in Phillips's Monthly Obituary; adding, that Amos was estimable both for his head and heart, and would have made a fine poet if he had lived. To the expediency of this measure Cottle fully assented, but could not help adding that he always thought that the qualities of his brother's heart exceeded those of his head. I believe his brother, when living, had formed precisely the same idea of him; and I apprehend the world will assent to both judgments. I rather guess that the Brothers were poetical rivals. I judged so when I saw them together. Poor Cottle, I must leave him after his short dream, to muse again upon his poor brother, for whom I am sure in secret he will yet shed many a tear.”

On November 3rd, 1800, Lamb tells Manning of another new friend. “I have made an acquisition latterly of a *pleasant hand*, one Rickman, to whom I was introduced by George Dyer, not the most flattering auspices under which one man can be introduced to another—George brings all sorts of people together, setting up a sort of agrarian law, or common property,

in matter of society ; but for once he has done me a great pleasure, while he was only pursuing a principle, as *ignes fatui may* light you home. This Rickman lives in our Buildings, immediately opposite our house ; the finest fellow to drop in a' nights, about nine or ten o'clock—cold bread-and-cheese time—just in the *wishing* time of the night, when you *wish* for somebody to come in, without a distinct idea of a probable anybody. Just in the nick, neither too early to be tedious, nor too late to sit a reasonable time. He is a most pleasant hand : a fine rattling fellow, has gone through life laughing at solemn apes ; himself hugely literate, oppressively full of information in all stuff of conversation, from matter of fact to Xenophon and Plato—can talk Greek with Porson, politics with Thelwall, conjecture with George Dyer, nonsense with me, and anything with anybody : a great farmer, somewhat concerned in an agricultural magazine—reads no poetry but Shakspeare, very intimate with Southey, but never reads his poetry : relishes George Dyer, thoroughly penetrates into the ridiculous wherever found, understands the *first time* (a great desideratum in common minds)—you need never twice speak to him ; does not want explanations, translations, limitations, as Professor Godwin does when you make an assertion : *up* to anything, *down* to everything—whatever *sapit hominem*. A perfect *man*. All this farrago, which must perplex you to read, and has put me to a little trouble to *select* ! only proves how impossible it is to describe a *pleasant hand*. You must see Rickman to know him, for he is a species in one. A new class. An exotic, any slip of which I am proud to put in my garden-pot. The clearest-headed fellow. Fullest of matter with least verbosity.”

John Rickman at that time was twenty-nine, between three and four years older than Lamb. He was the son of a clergyman, then in retirement, at Christchurch, in Hampshire, whither, to Lamb's thinking, he too often made a filial journey. On leaving Oxford, Rickman, a born political economist, edited the *Commercial, Agricultural, and Manufacturer's Magazine*. In 1796 he wrote a pamphlet on the expediency of taking the census, which was shown to Charles Abbot, then M.P. for Helston, and afterwards Speaker and Lord Colchester. Abbot, who was interested in this question, made Rickman his secretary in 1797, and in 1800 he introduced the first Census Act, largely through Rickman's assistance.

In 1801—to anticipate a little—Abbot was made Chief Secretary for Ireland, and Rickman accompanied him to Dublin. While there he procured for Southey the secretaryship to Isaac Corry, which he held for a short time. In one of his letters from Dublin Southey writes: “John Rickman is a great man in Dublin and in the eyes of the world, but not one jot altered from the John Rickman of Christchurch, save only that, in compliance with an extorted promise, he has deprived himself of the pleasure of scratching his head, by putting powder in it. He has astonished the people about him. The government stationer hinted to him, when he was giving an order, that if he wanted anything in the pocket-book way, he might as well put it down in the order. Out he pulled his own—‘Look, sir, I have bought one for two shillings.’ His predecessor admonished him not to let himself down by speaking to any of the clerks. ‘Why, sir,’ said John Rickman, ‘I should not let myself down if I spoke to every man between this and the bridge’! And so he goes on in his own right way.” When Abbot was elected Speaker in 1802, Rickman continued as his secretary, and there for the present we may leave him.

In the same letter that tells of Rickman we hear of *John Woodvil* once more. “At last I have written to Kemble, to know the event of my play, which was presented last Christmas. As I suspected, came an answer back that the copy was lost, and could not be found—no hint that anybody had to this day ever looked into it—with a courteous (reasonable!) request of another copy (if I had one by me,) and a promise of a definitive answer in a week. I could not resist so facile and moderate a demand, so scribbled out another, omitting sundry things . . . and sent this copy, written *all out* (with alterations, &c., *requiring judgment*) in one day and a half! I sent it last night, and am in weekly expectation of the tolling-bell and death-warrant.” Much more than a week was, however, to pass.

On November 28th, in another letter to Manning, we have one of the best of Lamb’s early passages of ecstasy. The subject is London, which he loved perhaps better than any—more like a lover than any—to the end. “I must confess that I am not romance-bit about *Nature*. The earth, and sea, and sky (when all is said) is but as a house to dwell in. If the inmates be



courteous, and good liquors flow like the conduits at an old coronation, if they can talk sensibly and feel properly, I have no need to stand staring upon the gilded looking-glass (that strained my friend's purse-strings in the purchase), nor his five-shilling print over the mantelpiece of old Nabbs the carrier (which only betrays his false taste). Just as important to me (in a sense) is all the furniture of my world—eye-pampering, but satisfies no heart. Streets, streets, streets, markets, theatres, churches, Covent Gardens, shops sparkling with pretty faces of industrious milliners, neat sempstresses, ladies cheapening, gentlemen behind counters lying, authors in the street with spectacles, George Dyers (you may know them by their gait), lamps lit at night, pastry-cooks' and silver-smiths' shops, beautiful Quakers of Pentonville, noise of coaches, drowsy cry of mechanic watchman at night, with bucks reeling home drunk; if you happen to wake at midnight, cries of Fire and Stop thief; inns of court, with their learned air, and halls, and butteries, just like Cambridge colleges; old book-stalls, Jeremy Taylors, Burtons on Melancholy, and Religio Medicis on every stall. These are thy pleasures, O London with-the-many-sins." (The reference to the beautiful Quakers of Pentonville will be explained in due course.)

This outburst, which was repeated more than once in the letters, and again, with more conscious artifice, in an essay in the *Morning Post*, serves to show us something of Lamb's delight in being, after nearly four years of exile in Pentonville, once again on his own ground, at the beginning of a period of urban domestication with his sister which was to last, with a few interruptions, for almost a quarter of a century. And here I should like to quote a passage from one who, so different in many ways, wrote with perfect comprehension and delicacy not only of Lamb but of that prose author whom perhaps he most admired—Sir Thomas Browne. The passage is in Walter Pater's *Appreciations*. "He felt the genius of places; and I sometimes think he resembles the place he knew and liked best, and where his lot fell—London, sixty-five years ago, with Covent Garden and the old theatres, and the Temple gardens still unspoiled, Thames gliding down, and beyond to north and south the fields of Enfield or Hampton, to which, 'with their living trees,' the thoughts wander 'from the hard wood of the



desk'—fields fresher, and coming nearer to town than, but in one of which the present writer remembers, on a brooding early summer's day, to have heard the cuckoo for the first time. Here, the surface of things is certainly humdrum, the streets dingy, the green places, where the child goes a-maying, tame enough. But nowhere are things more apt to respond to the brighter weather, nowhere is there so much difference between rain and sunshine, nowhere do the clouds roll together more grandly; those quaint suburban pastorals gathering a certain quality of grandeur from the background of the great city, with its weighty atmosphere, and portent of storm in the rapid light on dome and bleached stone steeples."

Early in December Lamb was busy upon the epilogue to Godwin's tragedy of "Antonio," which Kemble was about to produce at Drury Lane; the following whimsical note refers to one of his consultations with Godwin on the matter:—

"[Dec. 4, 1800.]

"DEAR SIR,—I send this speedily after the heels of Cooper (O! the dainty expression) to say that Mary is obliged to stay at home on Sunday to receive a female friend, from whom I am equally glad to escape. So that we shall be by ourselves. I write, because it may make *some* difference in your marketting, &c.

"C. L.

"Thursday Morning.

"I am sorry to put you to the expense of twopence postage. But I calculate thus: if Mary comes she will

eat Beef 2 plates, . . .	4d.
<i>Batter Pudding</i> 1 do . . .	2d.
Beer, a pint, . . .	2d.
Wine, 3 glasses, . . .	11d. I drink no wine!
Chesnuts, after dinner, . . .	2d.
Tea and supper at moderate calculation, . . .	9d.

---

2s. 6d.

From which deduct 2d. postage.

---

2s. 4d.

You are a clear gainer by her not coming."

The first (and last) night of "Antonio" was December 13th, 1800. In the essay on the old actors, in the *London Magazine*, Lamb told for all time the history of that luckless performance. I quote the story. "I remember, too acutely for my peace, the deadly extinguisher which he [Kemble] put upon my friend G.'s 'Antonio.' G., satiate with visions of political justice (possibly not to be realised in our time), or willing to let the sceptical worldlings see, that his anticipations of the future did not preclude a warm sympathy for men as they are and have been—wrote a tragedy. He chose a story, affecting, romantic, Spanish—the plot simple, without being naked—the incidents uncommon, without being overstrained. Antonio, who gives the name to the piece, is a sensitive young Castilian, who, in a fit of his country honour, immolates his sister—

"But I must not anticipate the catastrophe—the play, reader, is extant in choice English—and you will employ a spare half crown not injudiciously in the quest of it.

"The conception was bold, and the dénouement—the time and place in which the hero of it existed, considered—not much out of keeping; yet it must be confessed, that it required a delicacy of handling both from the author and the performer, so as not much to shock the prejudices of a modern English audience. G., in my opinion, had done his part.

"John, who was in familiar habits with the philosopher, had undertaken to play Antonio. Great expectations were formed. A philosopher's first play was a new era. The night arrived. I was favoured with a seat in an advantageous box, between the author and his friend M. [Marshall]. G. sate cheerful and confident. In his friend M.'s looks, who had perused the manuscript, I read some terror. Antonio in the person of John Philip Kemble at length appeared, starched out in a ruff which no one could dispute, and in most irreproachable mustachios. John always dressed most provokingly correct on these occasions. The first act swept by, solemn and silent. It went off, as G. assured M., exactly as the opening act of a piece—the protasis—should do. The cue of the spectators was to be mute. The characters were but in their introduction. The passions and the incidents would be developed hereafter. Applause hitherto would be impertinent. Silent attention was the effect all-desirable. Poor M. acquiesced—but in his honest friendly face I could discern a working which

told how much more acceptable the plaudit of a single hand (however misplaced) would have been than all this reasoning.

“The second act (as in duty bound) rose a little in interest; but still John kept his forces under—in policy, as G. would have it—and the audience were most complacently attentive. The protasis, in fact, was scarcely unfolded. The interest would warm in the next act, against which a special incident was provided. M. wiped his cheek, flushed with a friendly perspiration—’tis M.’s way of showing his zeal—‘from every pore of him a perfume falls—’ I honour it above Alexander’s. He had once or twice during this act joined his palms in a feeble endeavour to elicit a sound—they emitted a solitary noise without an echo—there was no deep to answer to his deep. G. repeatedly begged him to be quiet.

“The third act at length brought on the scene which was to warm the piece progressively to the final flaming forth of the catastrophe. A philosophic calm settled upon the clear brow of G. as it approached. The lips of M. quivered. A challenge was held forth upon the stage, and there was promise of a fight. The pit roused themselves on this extraordinary occasion, and, as their manner is, seemed disposed to make a ring,—when suddenly Antonio, who was the challenged, turning the tables upon the hot challenger, Don Gusman (who by the way should have had his sister) baulks his humour, and the pit’s reasonable expectation at the same time, with some speeches out of the new philosophy against duelling. The audience were here fairly caught—their courage was up, and on the alert—a few blows, *ding dong*, as R—s [Reynolds] the dramatist afterwards expressed it to me, might have done the business—when their most exquisite moral sense was suddenly called in to assist in the mortifying negation of their own pleasure. They could not applaud, for disappointment; they would not condemn, for morality’s sake. The interest stood stone still; and John’s manner was not at all calculated to unpetrify it. It was Christmas time, and the atmosphere furnished some pretext for asthmatic affections. One began to cough—his neighbour sympathised with him—till a cough became epidemical. But when, from being half-artificial in the pit, the cough got frightfully naturalised among the fictitious persons of the drama; and Antonio himself (albeit it was not set down in the stage directions) seemed more



intent upon relieving his own lungs than the distresses of the author and his friends,—then G. ‘first knew fear;’ and, mildly turning to M., intimated that he had not been aware that Mr. Kemble laboured under a cold; and that the performance might possibly have been postponed with advantage for some nights further—still keeping the same serene countenance, while M. sweat like a bull.

“It would be invidious to pursue the fates of this ill-starred evening. In vain did the plot thicken in the scenes that followed, in vain the dialogue wax more passionate and stirring, and the progress of the sentiment point more and more clearly to the arduous development which impended. In vain the action was accelerated, while the acting stood still. From the beginning John had taken his stand; had wound himself up to an even tenor of stately declamation, from which no exigence of dialogue or person could make him swerve for an instant. To dream of his rising with the scene (the common trick of tragedians) was preposterous; for from the onset he had planted himself, as upon a terrace, on an eminence vastly above the audience, and he kept that sublime level to the end. He looked from his throne of elevated sentiment upon the under-world of spectators with a most sovran and becoming contempt. There was excellent pathos delivered out to them: an they would receive it, so; an they would not receive it, so. There was no offence against decorum in all this; nothing to condemn, to damn. Not an irreverent symptom of a sound was to be heard.

“The procession of verbiage stalked on through four and five acts, no one venturing to predict what would come of it, when towards the winding up of the latter, Antonio, with an irrelevancy that seemed to stagger Elvira herself—for she had been coolly arguing the point of honour with him—suddenly whips out a poniard, and stabs his sister to the heart. The effect was, as if a murder had been committed in cold blood. The whole house rose up in clamorous indignation demanding justice. The feeling rose far above hisses. I believe at that instant, if they could have got him, they would have torn the unfortunate author to pieces. Not that the act itself was so exorbitant, or of a complexion different from what they themselves would have applauded upon another occasion in a Brutus, or an Appius—but for want of attending to Antonio’s *words*, which palpably



led to the expectation of no less dire an event, instead of being seduced by his *manner*, which seemed to promise a sleep of a less alarming nature than it was his cue to inflict upon Elvira, they found themselves betrayed into an accompliceship of murder, a perfect misprision of parricide, while they dreamed of nothing less.

“M., I believe, was the only person who suffered acutely from the failure; for G. thenceforward, with a serenity unattainable but by the true philosophy, abandoning a precarious popularity, retired into his fast hold of speculation,—the drama in which the world was to be his tiring room, and remote posterity his applauding spectators at once, and actors.”

Three days after the play's failure Lamb sent Manning a mischievous account of a visit to the disappointed author. “Calling in accidentally on the Professor while he was out, I was ushered into the study; and my nose quickly (most sagacious always) pointed me to four tokens lying loose upon thy table, Professor, which indicated thy violent and satanical pride of heart. Imprimis, there caught mine eye a list of six persons, thy friends, whom thou didst meditate inviting to a sumptuous dinner on the Thursday, anticipating the profits of thy Saturday's play to answer charges; I was in the honoured file! Next, a stronger evidence of thy violent and almost satanical pride, lay a list of all the morning papers (from the ‘Morning Chronicle’ downwards to the ‘Porcupine’), with the places of their respective offices, where thou wast meditating to insert, and didst insert, an elaborate sketch of the story of thy play—stones in thy enemy's hand to bruise thee with; and severely wast thou bruised, O Professor! nor do I know what oil to pour into thy wounds. Next, which convinced me to a dead conviction of thy pride, violent and almost satanical pride—lay a list of books, which thy un-tragedy-favoured pocket could never answer; Dodsley's Old Plays, Malone's Shakspeare (still harping upon thy play, thy philosophy abandoned meanwhile to Christians and superstitious minds); nay, I believe (if I can believe my memory), that the ambitious Encyclopædia itself was part of thy meditated acquisitions; but many a playbook was there. All these visions are *damned*; and thou, Professor, must read Shakspeare in future out of a common edition; and, hark ye, pray read him to a little better purpose! Last and

strongest against thee (in colours manifest as the hand upon Belshazzar's wall), lay a volume of poems by C. Lloyd and C. Lamb. Thy heart misgave thee, that thy assistant might possibly not have talent enough to furnish thee an epilogue!"

On December 27th a long-meditated visit to Manning at Cambridge is fixed for January 5th, 1801. "A word or two of my progress. Embark at six o'clock in the morning, with a fresh gale, on a Cambridge one-decker; very cold till eight at night; land at St. Mary's light-house, muffins and coffee upon table (or any other curious production of Turkey or both Indies), snipes exactly at nine, punch to commence at ten, with *argument*; difference of opinion is expected to take place about eleven; perfect unanimity, with some haziness and dimness, before twelve. —N.B. My single affection is not so singly wedded to snipes; but the curious and epicurean eye would also take a pleasure in beholding a delicate and well-chosen assortment of teals, ortolans, the unctuous and palate-soothing flesh of geese wild and tame, nightingales' brains, the sensorium of a young sucking-pig, or any other Christmas dish, which I leave to the judgment of you and the cook of Gonville."

At about the same time, or possibly a little earlier, Lamb sent Manning a copy of *John Woodvil*, which had now been definitely rejected, "compounded," as Manning had wished, by the hands of the author and his sister. This copy, which differs very considerably from the version of the play which Lamb printed in 1802, is now in America; it will be found minutely described in the notes to the fifth volume of my edition of Lamb's works.

## CHAPTER XVII

1801

Correspondence with Wordsworth—The Northern Castigation—The Move to 16 Mitre Court Buildings—The *Albion*—John Fenwick—Robert Fell—Captain Jackson—Randal Norris—George Burnett—*Specimens of English Prose Writers*—Lamb's "Ragged Intimados."

THE first letter of 1801 brings us to the beginning of Lamb's correspondence with the Wordsworths. The poet, who was then living with his sister Dorothy at Dove Cottage, Grasmere, was at that time nearly thirty-one; Lamb was nearly twenty-six. Wordsworth had sent Lamb the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and with it an invitation to the Lakes; in his reply Lamb indulges in another eulogy of London, and remarks on the poems which he likes best, offering some exceedingly sound and delicate criticism. "I will mention one more [beauty]: the delicate and curious feeling in the wish for the Cumberland Beggar, that he may have about him the melody of Birds, altho' he hear them not. Here the mind knowingly passes a fiction upon herself, first substituting her own feelings for the Beggar's, and, in the same breath detecting the fallacy, will not part with the wish.—The Poet's Epitaph is disfigured, to my taste, by the vulgar satire upon parsons and lawyers in the beginning, and the coarse epithet of pin point in the 6th stanza.<sup>1</sup> All the rest is eminently good, and your own.

<sup>1</sup> A Lawyer art thou?—draw not nigh;  
Go, carry to some other place  
The hardness of thy coward eye,  
The falsehood of thy sallow face.

Wrapp'd closely in thy sensual fleece  
O turn aside, and take, I pray,  
That he below may rest in peace,  
Thy pin-point of a soul away!



I will just add that it appears to me a fault in the *Beggar*, that the instructions conveyed in it are too direct and like a lecture: they don't slide into the mind of the reader, while he is imagining no such matter." Finally Lamb defends "The Ancient Mariner" against some strictures passed upon it by Wordsworth in the preface. The letter as a whole has perhaps a slight tone of reserve, the secret of which is perhaps to be found in the sarcastic postscript, "Thank you for Liking my Play!!"—for Lamb had sent the Wordsworths a holograph copy of *John Woodvil* many months before, and had only just received tidings of it, in the shape of a chill and formal approval.

Lamb's famous letter to Manning of February 15th indicates the result of his strictures among the Lakes. "I had need be cautious henceforward what opinion I give of the 'Lyrical Ballads.' All the North of England are in a turmoil. Cumberland and Westmoreland have already declared a state of war. I lately received from Wordsworth a copy of the second volume, accompanied by an acknowledgement of having received from me many months since a copy of a certain Tragedy, with excuses for not having made any acknowledgement sooner, it being owing to an 'almost insurmountable aversion from Letter-writing.' This letter I answered in due form and time, and enumerated several of the passages which had most affected me, adding, unfortunately, that no single piece had moved me so forcibly as the 'Ancient Mariner,' 'The Mad Mother,' or the 'Lines at Tintern Abbey.' The Post did not sleep a moment. I received almost instantaneously a long letter of four sweating pages from my Reluctant Letter-Writer, the purport of which was, that he was sorry his 2d vol. had not given me more pleasure (Devil a hint did I give that it had *not pleased me*), and 'was compelled to wish that my range of sensibility was more extended, being obliged to believe that I should receive large influxes of happiness and happy Thoughts.' . . ."

Lamb then gives the two extracts which Wordsworth had particularly wished him to admire as representing "a certain Union of Tenderness and Imagination, which in the sense he used Imagination was not the characteristic of Shakspeare, but which Milton possessed in a degree far exceeding other Poets: which Union, as the highest species of Poetry, and chiefly deserving

that name, 'He was most proud to aspire to.'" Lamb adds: "You see both these are good Poetry: but after one has been reading Shakspeare twenty of the best years of one's life, to have a fellow start up, and prate about some unknown quality, which Shakspeare possessed in a degree inferior to Milton and *somebody else*!!

"This was not to be *all* my castigation. Coleridge, who had not written to me [for] some months before, starts up from his bed of sickness to reprove me for my hardy presumption: four long pages, equally sweaty and more tedious, came from him; assuring me that, when the works of a man of true genius such as W. undoubtedly was, do not please me at first sight, I should suspect the fault to lie 'in me and not in them,' etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. What am I to do with such people? I certainly shall write them a very merry Letter." It is bitter to think that Lamb's very merry letter has vanished. The Lamb-Wordsworth correspondence, which continued to the end, is, however, of the highest interest without it; and although henceforward neither writer was to be offended, Wordsworth again and again drew from Lamb not perhaps his merriest thoughts but some quite merry and free ones.

In February Lamb tells Manning that he is going to change his lodgings: in April he has done so. "I live at No. 16 Mitre-court Buildings, a pistol-shot off Baron Maseres'. . . . When you come to see me, mount up to the top of the stairs—I hope you are not asthmatical—and come in flannel, for it's pure airy up there. And bring your glass, and I will shew you the Surrey Hills. My bed faces the river so as by perking up upon my haunches, and supporting my carcass with my elbows, without much wrying my neck, I can see the white sails glide by the bottom of the King's Bench walks as I lie in my bed. An excellent tiptoe prospect in the best room: casement windows with small panes, to look more like a cottage. Mind, I have got no bed for you, that's flat; sold it to pay expenses of moving. The very bed on which Manning lay—the friendly, the mathematical Manning!" Mitre Court Buildings, which have since been rebuilt, were Charles and Mary Lamb's first home in the Temple, on their return to it after an absence of nine years. They were destined not to leave it again until sixteen years had passed.

It must have been about this time that Lamb joined his friend John Fenwick on the *Albion*, an anti-ministerial weekly paper of which all trace has vanished. He has told the story of the *Albion* in the *Elia* essay on Newspapers. "Here [at the office of the paper] in murky closet, inadequate from its square contents to the receipt of the two bodies of Editor, and humble paragraph-maker, together at one time, sat in the discharge of his new Editorial functions (the 'Bigod' of *Elia*) the redoubted John Fenwick.

"F., without a guinea in his pocket, and having left not many in the pockets of his friends whom he might command, had purchased (on tick doubtless) the whole and sole Editorship, Proprietorship, with all the rights and titles (such as they were worth) of the *Albion*, from one Lovell; of whom we know nothing, save that he had stood in the pillory for a libel on the Prince of Wales. With this hopeless concern—for it had been sinking ever since its commencement, and could now reckon upon not more than a hundred subscribers—F. resolutely determined upon pulling down the Government in the first instance, and making both our fortunes by way of corollary. For seven weeks and more did this infatuated Democrat go about borrowing seven shilling pieces, and lesser coin, to meet the daily demands of the Stamp Office, which allowed no credit to publications of that side in politics. An outcast from politer bread, we attached our small talents to the forlorn fortunes of our friend. Our occupation now was to write treason.

"Recollections of feelings—which were all that now remained from our first boyish heats kindled by the French Revolution, when if we were misled, we erred in the company of some, who are accounted very good men now—rather than any tendency at this time to Republican doctrines—assisted us in assuming a style of writing, while the paper lasted, consonant in no very under-tone to the right earnest fanaticism of F. Our cue was now to insinuate, rather than recommend, possible abdications. Blocks, axes, Whitehall tribunals, were covered with flowers of so cunning a periphrasis—as Mr. Bayes says, never naming the *thing* directly—that the keen eye of an Attorney General was insufficient to detect the lurking snake among them."

A letter to Manning in the summer of 1801 completes the story. "For me, nothing new has happened to me, unless that



the poor 'Albion' died last Saturday of the world's neglect, and with it the fountain of my puns is choked up for ever. . . .

"I will close my letter of simple inquiry with an epigram on Mackintosh, the 'Vindiciæ Gallicæ'-man—who has got a place at last—one of the last I *did* for the 'Albion':—

Though thou'rt like Judas, an apostate black,  
In the resemblance one thing thou dost lack;  
When he had gotten his ill-purchas'd pelf,  
He went away, and wisely hanged himself:  
This thou may do at last, yet much I doubt,  
If thou hast any *Bowels* to gush out!"

Of Fenwick we know little beyond occasional references in Lamb and Godwin's letters, the passage I have quoted, and the character sketch in the *Elia* essay "The Two Races of Man," where he is thus described under the name of Bigod. "Early in life he found himself invested with ample revenues; which, with that noble disinterestedness which I have noticed as inherent in men of the *great race*, he took almost immediate measures entirely to dissipate and bring to nothing: for there is something revolting in the idea of a king holding a private purse; and the thoughts of Bigod were all regal. Thus furnished, by the very act of disfurnishment; getting rid of the cumbersome luggage of riches, more apt (as one sings)

To slacken virtue, and abate her edge,  
Than prompt her to do aught may merit praise,

he set forth, like some Alexander, upon his great enterprise, 'borrowing and to borrow!'

"In his periegesis, or triumphant progress throughout this island, it has been calculated that he laid a tythe part of the inhabitants under contribution. I reject this estimate as greatly exaggerated:—but having had the honour of accompanying my friend, divers times, in his perambulations about this vast city, I own I was greatly struck at first with the prodigious number of faces we met, who claimed a sort of respectful acquaintance with us. He was one day so obliging as to explain the phenomenon. It seems, these were his tributaries; feeders of his exchequer; gentlemen, his good friends (as he was pleased to express himself), to whom he had occasionally been beholden for a loan. Their multitudes did no way disconcert him. He

rather took a pride in numbering them; and, with Comus, seemed pleased to be 'stocked with so fair a herd.'

"With such sources, it was a wonder how he contrived to keep his treasury always empty. He did it by force of an aphorism, which he had often in his mouth, that 'money kept longer than three days stinks.' So he made use of it while it was fresh. A good part he drank away (for he was an excellent toss-pot), some he gave away, the rest he threw away, literally tossing and hurling it violently from him—as boys do burrs, or as if it had been infectious,—into ponds, or ditches, or deep holes,—inscrutable cavities of the earth;—or he would bury it (where he would never seek it again) by a river's side under some bank, which (he would facetiously observe) paid no interest—but out away from him it must go peremptorily, as Hagar's offspring into the wilderness, while it was sweet. He never missed it. The streams were perennial which fed his fisc. When new supplies became necessary, the first person that had the felicity to fall in with him, friend or stranger, was sure to contribute to the deficiency. For Bigod had an *undeniable* way with him. He had a cheerful, open exterior, a quick jovial eye, a bald forehead, just touched with grey (*cana fides*). He anticipated no excuse, and found none. And, waiving for a while my theory as to the *great race*, I would put it to the most untheorising reader, who may at times have disposable coin in his pocket, whether it is not more repugnant to the kindness of his nature to refuse such a one as I am describing, than to say *no* to a poor petitionary rogue (your bastard borrower), who, by his mumping visnomy, tells you, that he expects nothing better; and, therefore, whose preconceived notions and expectations you do in reality so much less shock in the refusal.

"When I think of this man; his fiery glow of heart; his swell of feeling; how magnificent, how *ideal* he was; how great at the midnight hour; and when I compare with him the companions with whom I have associated since, I grudge the saving of a few idle ducats, and think that I am fallen into the society of *lenders*, and *little men*."

John Fenwick was brought into Lamb's circle by Godwin, who knew many odd people. Mrs. Fenwick, who was the author of a novel called *Secrecy*, had been a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, whom she nursed at her death. Fenwick himself

wrote a farce called "The Indian," produced at Drury Lane in October, 1800, and he translated the memoirs of General Duperrier Dumouriez. Of his life subsequent to the *Albion* period we know very little except that it was punctuated by bankruptcy; that he followed the *Albion* with a paper called the *Plough*, of which all trace (as of the *Albion*) seems to have vanished; that he was at one time later editor of the *Statesman*; that in 1817, writing to Barron Field in Australia, Lamb refers to him as "a very old, honest friend of mine;" and that at some period he settled in America or Canada. He died in 1820.

Another of Lamb's occasional companions at this time was Fell, but of him we know even less than of Fenwick. The two books which I assume to be his have only R. Fell on the title page: *A Tour through the Batavian Republic*, 1801, and *Memories of the Public Life of Charles James Fox*, 1808. We may guess Fell to have been an amusing and very thirsty person. His peccadilloes seem to have been of a more serious nature than those of Fenwick, since Newgate is once hinted at as his home, whereas Fenwick drew the line at the Fleet or King's Bench. Fell also came to Lamb through Godwin.

Southey records in one of his letters that Lamb and Fell were once at Godwin's when the Philosopher committed the discourtesy of falling asleep: they therefore "carried off his rum, brandy, sugar, picked his pockets of every thing, and made off in triumph."

If, as I am constrained to believe, the "Confessions of a Drunkard," an essay written by Lamb in 1813, had many true statements in it, we may feel assured that neither Fenwick nor Fell did him much good. "Twelve years ago," he wrote, "I had completed my six and twentieth year. I had lived from the period of leaving school to that time pretty much in solitude. My companions were chiefly books, or at most one or two living ones of my own book-loving and sober stamp. I rose early, went to bed betimes, and the faculties which God had given me, I have reason to think, did not rust in me unused. About that time I fell in with some companions of a different order. They were men of boisterous spirits, sitters up a-nights, disputants, drunken; yet seemed to have something noble about them. We dealt about the wit, or what passes for it after midnight,



jovially. Of the quality called fancy I certainly possessed a larger share than my companions. Encouraged by their applause, I set up for a profest joker!"

Lamb's age in 1801—twenty-six—his intercourse with these careless journalists, the description of what he was before their day, all suggest the truth of this part of the Confessions. Whether, as he goes on to say (as we shall see later), the constant strain of trying to say brilliant things drove him to stimulants until he was enslaved by them, is another matter. There, I think, he exaggerated: depicting only what might have been, had he had no home responsibilities, and no position in a public office, to impress wisdom upon him. But of that more in its true place.

In Fenwick we may see an anticipatory Micawber, with a touch of Falstaff combined. But to get Lamb's contributions to the construction of Wilkins Micawber complete, we must add another of his friends of the same period, "Captain Jackson." We know nothing of Captain Jackson beyond what Lamb tells us in the *Last Essays of Elia*—not even his real name—but that Lamb did not invent but portray I feel convinced. The essay appeared in 1824, at which time Lamb remarks that some five and twenty years earlier (i.e., *circa* 1800) the Captain was his "dear old friend." I quote largely from this genial essay, not only to have another of Lamb's friends in his right place in the Life, but also to accumulate evidence as to the similarity of Lamb and Dickens in their fancy for the Micawber type. Add Captain Jackson to Ralph Bigod (with a touch of Coleridge's early grandiloquence) and you have Micawber complete.

"The Captain was a retired half-pay officer, with a wife and two grown-up daughters, whom he maintained with the port and notions of gentlewomen upon that slender professional allowance. Comely girls they were too.

"And was I in danger of forgetting this man?—his cheerful suppers—the noble tone of hospitality, when first you set your foot in *the cottage*—the anxious ministerings about you, where little or nothing (God knows) was to be ministered.—Althea's horn in a poor platter—the power of self-enchantment, by which, in his magnificent wishes to entertain you, he multiplied his means to bounties.

"You saw with your bodily eyes indeed what seemed a bare

scrag—cold savings from the foregone meal—remnant hardly sufficient to send a mendicant from the door contented. But in the copious will—the revelling imagination of your host—the ‘mind, the mind, Master Shallow,’ whole beeves were spread before you—hecatombs—no end appeared to the profusion.

“It was the widow’s cruse—the loaves and fishes; carving could not lessen nor helping diminish it—the stamina were left—the elemental bone still flourished, divested of its accidents.

“‘Let us live while we can,’ methinks I hear the open-handed creature exclaim; ‘while we have, let us not want,’ ‘here is plenty left;’ ‘want for nothing’—with many more such hospitable sayings, the spurs of appetite, and old concomitants of smoaking boards, and feast-oppressed chargers. Then sliding a slender ratio of Single Gloucester upon his wife’s plate, or the daughter’s, he would convey the remanent rind into his own, with a merry quirk of ‘the nearer the bone,’ &c., and declaring that he universally preferred the outside. For we had our table distinctions, you are to know, and some of us in a manner sate above the salt. None but his guest or guests dreamed of tasting flesh luxuries at night, the fragments were *verè hospitibus sacra*. But of one thing or another there was always enough, and leavings: only he would sometimes finish the remainder crust, to show that he wished no savings.

“Wine he had none; nor, except on very rare occasions, spirits; but the sensation of wine was there. Some thin kind of ale I remember—‘British beverage,’ he would say! ‘Push about, my boys;’ ‘Drink to your sweethearts, girls.’ At every meagre draught a toast must ensue, or a song. All the forms of good liquor were there, with none of the effects wanting. Shut your eyes, and you would swear a capacious bowl of punch was foaming in the centre, with beams of generous Port or Madeira radiating to it from each of the table corners. You got flustered, without knowing whence; tipsy upon words; and reeled under the potency of his unperforming Bacchanalian encouragements.

“We had our songs—‘Why, Soldiers, Why’—and the ‘British Grenadiers’—in which last we were all obliged to bear chorus. Both the daughters sang. Their proficiency was a nightly theme—the masters he had given them—the ‘no-expence’ which he spared to accomplish them in a science ‘so necessary to young

women.' But then—they could not sing 'without the instrument.' . . .

"He was a juggler, who threw mists before your eyes—you had no time to detect his fallacies. He would say 'hand me the *silver* sugar tongs;' and, before you could discover it was a single spoon, and that *plated*, he would disturb and captivate your imagination by a misnomer of 'the urn' for a tea kettle; or by calling a homely bench a sofa. Rich men direct you to their furniture, poor ones divert you from it; he neither did one nor the other, but by simply assuming that everything was handsome about him, you were positively at a demur what you did, or did not see, at *the cottage*. With nothing to live on, he seemed to live on everything. He had a stock of wealth in his mind; not that which is properly termed *Content*, for in truth he was not to be *contained* at all, but overflowed all bounds by the force of a magnificent self-delusion.

"Enthusiasm is catching; and even his wife, a sober native of North Britain, who generally saw things more as they were, was not proof against the continual collision of his credulity. Her daughters were rational and discreet young women; in the main, perhaps, not insensible to their true circumstances. I have seen them assume a thoughtful air at times. But such was the preponderating opulence of his fancy, that I am persuaded, not for any half hour together, did they ever look their own prospects fairly in the face. There was no resisting the vortex of his temperament. His riotous imagination conjured up handsome settlements before their eyes, which kept them up in the eye of the world too, and seem at last to have realised themselves; for they both have married since, I am told, more than respectably."

The late Canon Ainger suggested that Captain Jackson was to some extent a composite portrait, to which the Lambs' friend Randal Norris, Sub-Treasurer of the Inner Temple, contributed a few traits. But personally I prefer to think of the Captain as a separate character.<sup>1</sup> Here, however, might perhaps more fittingly be quoted part of Lamb's letter to Crabb Robinson (afterwards printed as "A Death-Bed"), written in 1827 on the occasion of Norris's death; because the impressions of Norris there recorded were gathered principally, I imagine, in these earlier days, and there is no record of much intimacy between the Lambs and the Norrises later, kindly as their thoughts of each other must

<sup>1</sup> A claim has been made by a Mr. Richard C. Jackson that his grandfather, Francis Jackson, was the very Captain. But I cannot support it. Francis Jackson entered Christ's Hospital a year after Lamb left, whereas the Captain was obviously a much older man.



always have been. It will help to complete the picture of Lamb's several very different friends at the beginning of the century and of his maturer life.

"In him [Lamb wrote, as Norris lay dead] I have a loss the world cannot make up. He was my friend, and my father's friend, for all the life that I can remember. I seem to have made foolish friendships since. Those are the friendships, which outlast a second generation. Old as I am getting, in his eyes I was still the child he knew me. To the last he called me Charley. I have none to call me Charley now. He was the last link that bound me to the Temple. . . . In him I seem to have lost the old plainness of manners and singleness of heart. Lettered he was not; his reading scarcely exceeded the Obituary of the old Gentleman's Magazine, to which he has never failed of having recourse for these last fifty years. Yet there was the pride of literature about him from that slender perusal; and moreover from his office of archive-keeper to your ancient city, in which he must needs pick up some equivocal Latin; which, among his less literary friends, assumed the air of a very pleasant pedantry. Can I forget the erudite look with which, having tried to puzzle out the text of a Black lettered Chaucer in your Corporation Library, to which he was a sort of Librarian, he gave it up with this consolatory reflection—'Charley,' said he, 'I do not know what you find in these very old books, but I observe, there is a deal of very indifferent spelling in them.' His jokes (for he had some) are ended; but they were old Perennials, staple, and always as good as new. He had one Song, that spake of the 'flat bottoms of our foes coming over in darkness,' and alluded to a threatened Invasion, many years since blown over; this he reserved to be sung on Christmas Night, which we always passed with him, and he sang it with the freshness of an impending event. How his eyes would sparkle when he came to the passage:—

' We'll still make 'em run, and we'll still make 'em sweat,  
In spite of the devil and Brussels' Gazette! ' "

Randal Norris, whose parents were Kentish people, was articled to Mr. Walls of Paper Buildings at the age of fourteen, and he lived in the Temple ever after and was buried there. Mrs. Norris, *née* Faint, was born at Widford, and was a friend of Mrs. Field. Mary Lamb was a bridesmaid at their wedding.

One other of Lamb's early acquaintances may be here introduced and—since he never was so intimate or remarkable as to enter into the woof and warp of his life—dismissed. This was the unfortunate George Burnett. Burnett was born probably in 1776. He met Southey at Balliol, was introduced by him to Coleridge in 1794, and it was he who with Coleridge “talked” Pantisocracy “into shape.” The Rev. Cuthbert Southey writes thus of Burnett in Southey's *Life and Letters*. “Among my father's college friends, and as forming one of the enthusiastic party who were to have formed a ‘model republic’ on the bank of the Susquehannah, has been mentioned George Burnett, who, of all the number, suffered most permanently from having taken up those visionary views. He had intended to enter the Church of England, and, had he not been tempted to quit the beaten track, would probably have become a steady, conscientious, and useful clergyman. Carried away by the influence chiefly of my father and Mr. Coleridge, he imbibed first their political and then their religious opinions; and thus, being led to abandon the intention with which he had entered Oxford, he became so completely unsettled as to render his short life a series of unsuccessful attempts in many professions. Much of this was indeed, owing to the vacillating character of his mind; but it was not the less through life a subject of regret to my father, not unmixed with self-reproach.

“At the present time [1798] he was minister to a Unitarian congregation at Yarmouth; whither my father now went for a short visit, having the additional motive of seeing his brother Henry, whom, some time previously, he had placed with Burnett as a private pupil. Through Burnett's means he was now introduced to William Taylor, of Norwich.”

Burnett, who seems to have been an utterly ill-balanced, feckless and decadent character, made many experiments. Like Charles Lloyd, he studied medicine at Edinburgh; like George Dyer, he was tutor to the sons of “Citizen” Stanhope; like Robert Allen, he became an army surgeon. He also lived for a while in a Polish family. But he was nothing long. Lamb's letter to Rickman concerning Dyer (at the end of 1801), from which I have quoted on page 151, shows Burnett as a hack in bondage to the famous Richard Phillips, the publisher of the *Monthly Magazine* and a host of other periodicals and books.

Herein Lamb's G. B. was like another and more famous G. B. of later date; but poor Burnett has left us no *Lavengro* with a scathing portrait of his employer in it, as George Borrow did.

Lamb writes thus of Burnett in the Rickman letter: "I promised Burnet to write when his parcel went. He wants me to certify that he is more awake than you think him. I believe he may be by this time, but he is so full of self-opinion that I fear whether he and Phillips will ever do together. What he is to do for Phillips he whimsically seems to consider more as a favor done *to P.* than a job *from P.* He still persists to call employment *dependence* and prates about the insolence of booksellers and the tax upon geniusses. Poor devil! he is not launched upon the ocean and is sea-sick with aforethought. I write plainly about him, and he would stare and yawn finely if he read this treacherous epistle, but I really am anxious about him, and that [? it] nettles me to see him so proud and so helpless. If he is not serv'd he will never serve himself. I read his long letter to Southey, which I suppose you have seen. He had better have been furnishing copy for Phillips than luxuriating in tracing the causes of his imbecillity. I believe he is a little wrong in not ascribing more to the structure of his own mind. He had his yawns from nature, his pride from education.

"I hope to see Southey soon, so I need only send my remembrance to him now. Doubtless I need not tell him that Burnett is not to be foster'd in self-opinion. His eyes want opening to see himself a man of middling stature. I am not oculist enough to do this. The booksellers may one day remove the film. I am all this time on the most cordial supping terms of amity with G. Burnett and really love him at times: but I must speak freely of people behind their backs and not think it back-biting. It is better than Godwin's way of telling a man he is a fool to his face.

"I think if you could do any thing for George in the way of an office (God knows whether you can in any haste, but you did talk of it) it is my firm belief that it would be his *only chance* of settlement; he will never live by his *literary exertions*, as he calls them—he is too proud to go the usual way to work and he has no talents to make that way unnecessary. I know he talks big in his letter to Southey that his mind is undergoing an alteration and that the die is now casting that shall consign him



to honor or dishonour, but these expressions are the convulsions of a fever, not the sober workings of health. Translated into plain English he now and then perceives he must work or starve, and then he thinks he'll work; but when he goes about it there's a lion in the way. He came dawdling to me for an Encyclopædia yesterday. I recommended him to Norris' library and he said if he could not get it there Phillips was bound to furnish him with one. It was Phillips' interest to do so and all that. This was true with some restrictions—but as to Phillips' interests to oblige G. B.! Lord help his simple head! P. could by a *whistle* call together a host of such authors as G. B. like Robin Hood's merry men in green. P. has regular regiments in pay. Poor writers are his crab-lice and suck at him for nutriment. His round pudding chops are their *idea* of plenty when *in their idle fancies they aspire to be rich.*"

We get glimpses of Burnett's after career in the letters from Lamb to Rickman which were recently made public by Canon Ainger. Rickman continued his friend, in spite of Burnett's very unsatisfactory return for assistance. It was in 1802 that he became tutor to the sons of "Citizen" Stanhope, the revolutionary earl. But his pupils ran away and the engagement soon ceased. Later, he entered the militia as a surgeon, and on giving this up, left for Poland in some teaching capacity. In 1806 he was, however, back again, for, writing to Sarah Stoddart in April, Mary Lamb says: "Your friend George Burnett calls as usual, for Charles to *point out something for him.*"

The passage means that Burnett was then busy on his *Specimens of English Prose-Writers to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, and that Lamb was helping him in his selections. I fancy that now and then Lamb did more: some of the critical epithets suggest his taste quite as much as the extracts, as for example, when it is said of Sir Thomas Browne that he "delighted to live in the conjectural world, and lived in it so long, that conjectures and things impossible to be known, assumed the place of realities and things knowable;" or of Izaak Walton, that the morality of his book is "pure and peaceful as the lake on which the angler silently awaits his quiet prey;" or of Jeremy Taylor, that "his similes, indeed, are often crowded, and the general effect is dissipated and weakened by a redundancy of beauties," but that "no writer can exceed him in

sentimental painting — in awful representation.” Lamb’s *Dramatic Specimens* were in the nature of a companion to Burnett’s book, just as Burnett’s *Specimens of Prose* were suggested by George Ellis’s *Specimens of the Early English Poets*. All were published by Longmans.

Burnett, as we shall see, died miserably in 1811.

Young though he was—only twenty-six—Lamb had already as interesting and varied a band of friends as perhaps any man in England. Coleridge and Manning, Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth, Southey and Captain Jackson, George Dyer and John Rickman, Burnett and James White, Fenwick and Charles Lloyd, Godwin and Fell—these are diverse enough. “He chose his companions,” Lamb was to write of himself many years later, “for some individuality of character which they manifested. Hence, not many persons of science, and few professed *litterati*, were of his councils. They were, for the most part, persons of an uncertain fortune; and, as to such people commonly nothing is more obnoxious than a gentleman of settled (though moderate) income, he passed with most of them for a great miser. To my knowledge this was a mistake. His *intimados*, to confess a truth, were in the world’s eye a ragged regiment. He found them floating on the surface of society; and the colour, or something else, in the weed pleased him. The burrs stuck to him—but they were good and loving burrs for all that. He never greatly cared for the society of what are called good people. If any of these were scandalised (and offences were sure to arise), he could not help it.” So early we see the tendencies thus described beginning to assert themselves.

We may resume the story of 1801 with a quotation from a letter to Walter Wilson (an India House clerk, and afterwards the biographer of Defoe) in which Lamb apologises for some unknown prank at Richmond. It is an interesting note, because it states very clearly and honestly his state of mind at that time: “I know that you think a very important difference in opinion with respect to some more serious subjects between us makes me a dangerous companion; but do not rashly infer, from some slight and light expressions which I may have made use of in a moment of levity in your presence, without sufficient regard to your feelings—do not conclude that I am an inveterate enemy to all religion. I have had a time of seriousness, and I have known the importance

and reality of a religious belief. Latterly, I acknowledge, much of my seriousness has gone off, whether from new company or some other new associations; but I still retain at bottom a conviction of the truth, and a certainty of the usefulness, of religion. I will not pretend to more gravity or feeling than I at present possess; my intention is not to persuade you that any great alteration is probable in me; sudden converts are superficial and transitory; I only want you to believe that I have *stamina* of seriousness within me, and that I desire nothing more than a return of that friendly intercourse which used to subsist between us, but which my folly has suspended."

In another letter, not yet collected with any edition of Lamb's correspondence—written to Manning probably in September of this year—Lamb remarks, "But seriously what do you think of this Life of ours? Can you make head or tail on't? How we came here, that I have some tolerable bawdy hint of; what we came here for, that I know no more than [an] Ideot." Thereafter, like a practical man confounded by a great mystery, he never says much of religion, nor, so far as I can discover, did he practise religious forms. He was sufficiently occupied in doing his duty.

Of 1801 there is little more to tell. A communication to Godwin in September, concerning his new play "Faulkener," which was not, however, performed until 1807, informs us that Lamb was staying at Margate in that month, almost certainly with his sister. It was from Margate that he wrote the letter to Manning from which I have just quoted. Therein he also says, "You dropt a word whether in jest or earnest, as if you would join me in some work, such as a review or series of papers, essays, or anything.—Were you serious? I want some occupation, and I more want money. Had you any scheme, or was it, as G. Dyer says, *en passant*? If I don't have a Legacy left me shortly, I must get into pay with some newspaper for small gains. Mutton is twelvepence a pound." To this scheme we come in the next chapter.

In a letter to Rickman on September 16th, 1801, we meet yet another acquaintance who, however antipathetic, was destined to bring about some of the Lambs' most charming work. "I know no more news from here, except that the Professor (Godwin) is courting. The Lady is a Widow with green spectacles and one



child, and the Professor is grown quite juvenile. He bows when he is spoke to, and smiles without occasion, and wriggles as fantastically as Malvolio, and has more affectation than a canary bird pluming his feathers, when he thinks somebody looks at him. He lays down his spectacles, as if in scorn, and takes 'em up again from necessity, and winks that she mayn't see he gets sleepy about eleven o'Clock. You never saw such a philosophic coxcomb, nor any one play the Romeo so unnaturally."

Godwin married in December, 1801, the lady being Mrs. Clairmont, a widow, and the mother of Byron's Jane Clairmont. She quickly turned out to be, as Lamb told Manning a little later, a disagreeable woman, "so much so as to drive me and some more old cronies from his house." Lamb and Mrs. Godwin seem never to have liked each other, as we learn from remarks in the letters and also from a little character sketch of her which he contributed over the signature "Lepus" to the *New Times* in 1825; but it must not be forgotten that had she not insisted upon becoming a publisher of books for children—to help out the precarious Godwin finances—those exquisite things, Charles Lamb's story of "The Sea Voyage" and Mary Lamb's story of "The Sailor Uncle" (in *Mrs. Leicester's School*) might have remained unwritten.

Lepus (the hare with too many friends) thus describes Godwin's second helpmate: "Mrs. Priscilla Pry must not only know all about your private concerns, but be as deeply concerned herself for them: she will pluck at the very heart of your mystery. She must anatomise and skin you, absolutely lay your feelings bare. Her passions are reducible to two, but those are stronger in her than in any human creature—*pity* and *envy*. I will try to illustrate it. She has intimacy with two families—the Grimstones and the Gubbins's. The former are sadly pinched to live, the latter are in splendid circumstances: the former tenant an obscure third floor in Devereux Court, the latter occupy a stately mansion in May-fair. I have accompanied her to both these domiciles. She will burst into the incommodious lodging of poor Grimstone and his wife at some unseasonable hour, when they are at their meagre dinner, with a 'Bless me! what a dark passage you have! I could hardly find my way up stairs! Isn't there a drain somewhere? Well, I like to see you at your *little* bit of mutton!' But her treat is to catch them at a meal of

solitary potatoes. Then does her sympathy burgeon, and bud out into a thousand flowers of rhetorical pity and wonder; and it is trumpeted out afterwards to all her acquaintance, that the poor Grimstones were 'making a dinner without flesh yesterday.' The word *poor* is her favourite; the word (on my conscience) is endeared to her beyond any monosyllable in the language. Poverty, in the tone of her compassion, is somehow doubled; it is emphatically what a dramatist, with some licence, has called *poor poverty*. It is stark-naked *indigence*, and never in her mind connected with any mitigating circumstances of self-respect and independence in the owner, which give to poverty a dignity. It is an object of pure pity, and nothing else.

"This is her first way. Change we the scene to May-fair and the Gubbins's. Suppose it a morning call:—'Bless me!—(for she equally blesses herself against want and abundance)—what a style you *do* live in! what elegant curtains! You must have a great income to afford all these things. I wonder you can ever visit such poor folks as we!'—with more to the same purpose, which I must cut short, not to be tedious. She pumps all her friends to know the exact income of all her friends. Such a one must have a great salary. Do you think he has as much as eight hundred a year—seven hundred and fifty perhaps? A wag once told her I had fourteen hundred—(Heaven knows we Bank Clerks, though with no reason to complain, in few cases realise that luxury)—and the fury of her wonder, till I undeceived her, nearly worked her spirits to a fever. Now Pry is equally glad to get at his friends' circumstances; but his curiosity is disinterested, as I said, and passionless. No emotions are consequent upon the satisfaction of it. He is a philosopher who loves knowledge for its own sake; she is not content with a *lumen siccum* (dry knowledge, says Bacon, is best); the success of her researches is nothing, but as it feeds the two main springs between which her soul is kept in perpetual conflict—Pity and Envy." There is not the slightest doubt that Mrs. Godwin sat for this portrait; but it must not be assumed, I think, that Lamb went to Godwin for its companion "Tom Pry," although he may have suggested a few traits. The original of Tom Pry was, I believe, Tommy Hill, the drysalter, whose inquisitiveness was a byword.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## LAMB AS JOURNALIST

1801-1804

WE have seen Lamb attempting to get work on the *Morning Post* and failing; we have seen him on the *Albion*, lampooning the Government and at last putting an end to the paper, in August, 1801, by a too caustic epigram. Nowise daunted he made other efforts to add a journalist's pickings to his India House salary, and between 1801 and 1804, with long periods of inactivity, he occasionally succeeded. In the present chapter I shall endeavour to tell the story of these efforts.

Writing to Manning on August 31st, 1801, Lamb says that he has a sort of opening to the *Morning Chronicle*, then edited by James Perry. "I shall have a difficult job to manage, for you must know that Mister Perry, in common with the great body of the Whigs, thinks 'The Albion' *very low*. I find I must rise a peg or so, be a little more decent and less abusive; for, to confess the truth, I had arrived to an abominable pitch; I spared neither age nor sex when my cue was given me."

Lamb also mentions that Rickman has gone to Ireland, where he had the post of Deputy-Keeper of the Privy Seal in addition to his duties as private secretary to Abbot, the Chief Secretary. One of Rickman's first actions was to induce Southey to accept a sinecure in Dublin. In a letter from Southey at Dublin to Coleridge, dated October 16th, we have news of Lamb's journalism. "From Lamb's letter to Rickman I learn that he means to print his play, which is the lukewarm John [Woodvil], whose plan is as obnoxious to Rickman as it was to you and me; and that he has been writing for the *Albion*, and now writes for the *Morning Chronicle*, where more than two-thirds of his materials are superciliously rejected. Stuart (of the *Morning Post*) would use him more kindly. Godwin having had a second tragedy



rejected, has filched a story from one of De Foe's novels for a third, and begged hints of Lamb." A consultation of the file of the *Chronicle* from August to December, 1801, yields little that can positively be attributed to Lamb, but he was probably the author of a long would-be comic letter on Horns, signed Cornuto, on August 5th, and possibly of a similar contribution on Crim. Con. on August 11th. Here and there a paragraph also seems to suggest his hand; but his connection with the paper was, I imagine, very brief.

Lamb's own account of his journalistic adventures at this period of his life is very misleading, but I have, I think, tracked his pen. In the *Elia* essay on newspapers he says that he passed from the *Morning Post* to the *Albion*; but there is no doubt that his memory here played him false. We have seen him trying Stuart with specimens of his work, to no purpose. There is unquestionable evidence (in the letters to Rickman, recently published by Canon Ainger) that his first regular contributions to the *Morning Post*, under Stuart, were at the beginning of 1802, when he was permitted to write a few dramatic criticisms and paragraphs. The only dramatic articles that can be absolutely identified are those on G. F. Cooke, as Richard III. and Lear (printed in Vol. I. of my edition of Lamb's works), which appeared on January 4th and 9th, 1802. Stuart, it seems, required the notice of a play to be printed the next morning, and Lamb was not able to work so hurriedly as to make compliance possible. Two other short articles, non-theatrical in subject, we can identify as Lamb's either from internal or external evidence: the comic description of the Lord Mayor's State bed, on January 4th, and the fable for Twelfth Night (an anticipation by twenty years of the "Rejoicings on the New Year's Coming of Age"), on January 6th. He also contributed on January 6th the comic poem "Dick Strype," signed Timothy Bramble. On February 1st came the essay "The Londoner," which marked the end of Lamb's association with Daniel Stuart. Writing many years afterwards, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1838, concerning Coleridge's work for the *Morning Post*, Stuart said, "But as for poor Charles Lamb, I never could make anything of him."

In a letter to Rickman on January 14th, 1802, Lamb admits that he and Stuart are not likely to get on and he says that for the most part he will now contribute only paragraphs. "I

beg you not to read with much expectation, for my poor paragraphs do only get in when there are none of any body's else. Most of them are rejected; all, almost, that are *personal*, where my forte lies. And I cannot get at once out of the delightful regions of scurrility, the 'Delectable Mountains' of *Albion* where whilom I fed my sheep, unto the kickshaws of fashionable tittle-tattle, which I *must learn*."

Exactly a month later he writes to Rickman again, in this strain: "Your guineas (which, let me tell you, are too much, but you shall have your way) are not absolutely mal-a-pros, for by a cruel reverse of Fortune, that Dame who is painted with a wheel to signify to you that she is changes, and rollings, and mutabilities, I am no longer Paragraph spinner. . . . I have given this up only two days, and I feel myself at elbow room, free and happy. I can scribble now at my heart's Leisure, if I have an impulse, and tho' I know I speak as a fool, I am sure I can write better gratis. Say no more about it, I have weighed my loss and my gain, and I write *Profit*."

We see therefore that Lamb's first set of paragraphs for the *Morning Post* must be sought for between early January and the middle of February, 1802. I fancy that most of those that follow may be attributed to his playful hand.

Mr. MONK LEWIS has reason to complain of his friends, the *fairies* and *hobgoblins*, that they did not save him from his late fall. As to the *genii*, it is well known that he never had so much as one of them to protect him. [Jan. 1st, 1802.]

A pupil of Mr. BURKE, who heard of the French orator's scheme of planting *funeral vistas* and *melancholy shades*, thought of his old master's memorable sentence: "In the *groves* of their *academy*, at the end of every *vista*, you see nothing but the gallows!"—A good hint to French *vista-fanciers*. [Jan. 1st, 1802.]

Mr. MONK LEWIS was so much hurt by his fall, that, we are told, he continued for some minutes *senseless*. *Very probable*. [Jan. 2nd, 1802.]

It is now asserted that the practice of *vaccine inoculation* was known to the antients; and that the transformation of NEBUCHADNEZZAR was effected by a series of successful operations to *brutify* the human species. [Jan. 4th, 1802.]

The bird that *can* sing, and *won't* sing, must be *made* to sing. The PYE [the Poet Laureate] is a bird that *will* sing, and *can't* sing, and never was *made* for singing. [Jan. 4th, 1802.]

When ladies of such *rotund proportions* as Mrs. POWELL and Mrs. BLAND make such *slender sprites* and *speeches*, we may suppose they can bear *compression*. [Jan. 7th, 1802. See page 309.]

Twelfth-day merry-makers draw *King* and *Queen*, and nobody wonders. The only wonder is, how Mr. A——N [Addington] came to attract His MAJESTY. [Jan. 8th, 1802.]

To see some of the prize ribs, and fashionable surloins, which hang up in our markets, one would imagine, that some of "nature's journeymen" had made the beasts, and *left out the lean*. [Jan. 8th, 1802.]

We find in the weekly account of clerical promotions that the Rev. Mr. *Sheepshanks* succeeds Dr. *Mereweather* in the Rectory of *Bleating*. [Jan. 18th, 1802.]

In a late conversation upon the subject of the great days sporting at Mr. COKE's, a Cockney observed, "that he knew nothing about Norfolk Rabbits, but that he would engage to take a *Welch Rabbit* with any man in the kingdom." [Jan. 19th, 1802.]

There is no *virtue* like *necessity*, says the proverb. If that be true, what a quantity of *virtue* there must be among the lower orders of people in this country! [Jan. 22nd, 1802.]

There was a fine display of female *ancles* yesterday, in consequence of the *high wind*, and many a beau's breast was *blown into a flame*. [Jan. 22nd, 1802.]

A dashing young buck, from one of our Universities, was lately congratulating himself upon being appointed to an advantageous situation as Tutor to a young Nobleman; a friend observed, that he would now enjoy the delightful occupation of "Teaching the young idea how to *shoot*."—"Aye, aye," he replied, "I will teach the young dog *how to shoot*." [Jan. 22nd, 1802. Lamb tells this story of Valentine Le Grice, in a letter to Coleridge in 1796.]

We hope our illustrious Commander in Egypt will not tarnish his *living laurels* with an overmuch anxiety about *dead Beys*. [Jan. 28th, 1802.]

A *ghost* would certainly make a *fashionable wife*, as, according to the ghostly system, her husband and she would never meet but *at night*. [Jan. 29th, 1802.]

If relationship and kindred be inferred from similarity of name and sentiments, BURKE, the *pugilist*, is a near relation to BURKE, the orator. This latter gentleman, if we mistake not, in his Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful, recommends *black* and *blue* as more solemn and sublime than white, green, or yellow; and in explicit terms extols *purple*. [Jan. 30th, 1802.]

*Painters* and *Parliament men* are, we find, alike flatterers upon *canvas*. [Feb. 2nd, 1802.]

The *widows* of the English Officers who married *natives* in India only evince their lasting attachment to *sables*. [Feb. 3rd, 1802.]

A *bench* of Justices certainly gives us an idea of something *wooden*. SHAKESPEARE, in his seven ages, represents a Justice as made up with saws, &c. [Feb. 3rd, 1802.]

Mr. PITT having proved himself an unworthy *Guardian*, and an useless *Tatler*, has for some time past been an *Idler* in Bond-street, and is at present in the House of Commons a *Spectator*. [Feb. 6th, 1802.]

LOCKE compares the mind of a new born infant to a sheet of white paper not yet written on. It must be confessed, that whoever wrote upon Mr. A——N's mind has left *large margins*. [Feb. 10th, 1802.]



In some countries, a slip in the matrimonial life is punished with the loss of the offender's *teeth*: what a mortification to the eager devourers of *sandwiches*? [Feb. 11th, 1802.]

*Old Q.* in his great attention to subjects of *natural* history, has of late made some surprising discoveries in *chemise-try*. [Feb. 12th, 1802.]

The jest of the new opera lies in a *woman* being *concealed* in a *Cabinet*—we do not approve of *petticoat influence* in *Cabinets*. [Feb. 12th, 1802.]

From the increasing number of men that have fallen victims to the justice of their country, who formerly figured away in the haunts of *fashionable life*, the *fatal cord* has properly been termed a *beau-string*. [Feb. 13th, 1802.]

It is now time to quote *Elia*. "In those days [1801-1803] every Morning Paper, as an essential retainer to its establishment, kept an author, who was bound to furnish daily a quantum of witty paragraphs. Sixpence a joke—and it was thought pretty high too—was Dan Stuart's settled remuneration in these cases. The chat of the day, scandal, but, above all, *dress*, furnished the material. The length of no paragraph was to exceed seven lines. Shorter they might be, but they must be poignant.

"A fashion of *flesh*, or rather *pink*-coloured hose for the ladies, luckily coming up at the juncture, when we were on our probation for the place of Chief Jester to S.'s paper, established our reputation in that line. We were pronounced a 'capital hand.' O the conceits which we varied upon *red* in all its prismatic differences! from the trite and obvious flower of Cytherea, to the flaming costume of the lady that has her sitting upon 'many waters.' Then there was the collateral topic of ancles. What an occasion to a truly chaste writer, like ourself, of touching that nice brink, and yet never tumbling over it, of a seemingly ever approximating something 'not quite proper;' while, like a skilful posture-master, balancing betwixt decorums and their opposites, he keeps the line, from which a hair's-breadth deviation is destruction; hovering in the confines of light and darkness, or where 'both seem either;' a hazy uncertain delicacy; Autolycus-like in the Play, still putting off his expectant auditory with 'Whoop, do me no harm, good man!' But, above all, that conceit arrided us most at that time, and still tickles our midriff to remember, where, allusively to the flight of *Astræa*—*ultima Cælestium terras reliquit*—we pronounced—in reference to the stockings still—that **MODESTY TAKING HER FINAL LEAVE OF MORTALS, HER LAST BLUSH WAS VISIBLE IN HER**

ASCENT TO THE HEAVENS BY THE TRACT OF THE GLOWING INSTEP. This might be called the crowning conceit; and was esteemed tolerable writing in those days.

“But the fashion of jokes, with all other things, passes away; as did the transient mode which had so favoured us. The ancles of our fair friends in a few weeks began to reassume their whiteness, and left us scarce a leg to stand upon. Other female whims followed, but none, methought, so pregnant, so invitatory of shrewd conceits, and more than single meanings.

“Somebody has said, that to swallow six cross-buns daily consecutively for a fortnight would surfeit the stoutest digestion. But to have to furnish as many jokes daily, and that not for a fortnight, but for a long twelvemonth, as we were constrained to do, was a little harder execution. ‘Man goeth forth to his work until the evening’—from a reasonable hour in the morning, we presume it was meant. Now as our main occupation took us up from eight till five every day in the City; and as our evening hours, at that time of life, had generally to do with any thing rather than business, it follows, that the only time we could spare for this manufactory of jokes—our supplementary livelihood, that supplied us in every want beyond mere bread and cheese—was exactly that part of the day which (as we have heard of No Man’s Land) may be fitly denominated No Man’s Time; that is, no time in which a man ought to be up, and awake, in. To speak more plainly, it is that time, of an hour, or an hour and a half’s duration, in which a man, whose occasions call him up so preposterously, has to wait for his breakfast.

“O those headaches at dawn of day, when at five, or half-past-five in summer, and not much later in the dark seasons, we were compelled to rise, having been perhaps not above four hours in bed—for we were no go-to-beds with the lamb, though we anticipated the lark oftentimes in her rising—we liked a parting cup at midnight, as all young men did before these effeminate times, and to have our friends about us—we were not constellated under Aquarius, that watery sign, and therefore incapable of Bacchus, cold, washy, bloodless—we were none of your Basilian water-sponges, nor had taken our degrees at Mount Ague—we were right toping Capulets, jolly companions, we and they—but to have to get up, as we said before, curtailed of half our fair sleep, fasting, with only a dim vista of refreshing

Bohea in the distance—to be necessitated to rouse ourselves at the detestable rap of an old hag of a domestic, who seemed to take a diabolical pleasure in her announcement that it was ‘time to rise;’ and whose chappy knuckles we have often yearned to amputate, and string them up at our chamber door, to be a terror to all such unseasonable rest-breakers in future—

“‘Facil’ and sweet, as Virgil sings, had been the ‘descending’ of the over-night, balmy the first sinking of the heavy head upon the pillow; but to get up, as he goes on to say,

—revocare gradus, superasque evadere ad auras—

and to get up moreover to make jokes with malice pre-pended—there was the ‘labour,’ there the ‘work.’

“No Egyptian taskmaster ever devised a slavery like to that, our slavery. No fractious operants ever turned out for half the tyranny, which this necessity exercised upon us. Half a dozen jests in a day (bating Sundays too), why, it seems nothing! We make twice the number every day in our lives as a matter of course, and claim no Sabbatical exemptions. But then they come into our head. But when the head has to go out to them—when the mountain must go to Mahomet—

“Reader, try it for once, only for one short twelvemonth.

“It was not every week that a fashion of pink stockings came up; but mostly, instead of it, some rugged, untractable subject; some topic impossible to be contorted into the risible; some feature, upon which no smile could play; some flint, from which no process of ingenuity could procure a distillation. There they lay; there your appointed tale of brick-making was set before you, which you must finish, with or without straw, as it happened. The craving Dragon—the *Public*—like him in Bel’s temple—must be fed; it expected its daily rations; and Daniel, and ourselves, to do us justice, did the best we could on this side bursting him.” Lamb goes on to say that on the *Morning Post* changing proprietorship, he passed to the *Albion*. But what, as I have said, really happened was that at the beginning of 1802 he had five or six weeks on the *Morning Post*; gave it up in February; and then, two years after the *Albion*’s decease, on the *Morning Post* changing proprietorship, which it did in September, 1803 (the issue for September 20th was the last to



bear Stuart's imprint), he joined the staff again, and began a connection as chief jester that lasted for some months.

The fashion of red stockings came in about October, 1803, and raged until the end of the year; and though Lamb's specimen joke, quoted above, is not found among them, many of his conceits upon the colour are easily identified. Perhaps that crowning jest was of more mature conception—a specimen of *l'esprit d'escalier*. It will be seen, from the paragraphs that follow, that in those days Lamb was a mechanical humorist. Newspaper jokes were more easily made than now: the competition was not so keen and the choice of subject was wider. Ladies' underclothing, a source of perpetual delight to wags of the *Morning Post*, is no longer fair game, nor does Crim. Con. yield facetious copy as once it did. But, none the less, some of Lamb's italics are painfully like the italics of our own comic press. I think there need be very little doubt that Lamb's hand ("sparing neither man nor woman") may be seen in the very harmless quips that follow; certainly few journalists but he could have written those that have a literary motive.

The only sign of *modesty* in the present dress of the Ladies is the *pink dye* of their stockings, which makes their legs appear to *blush* for the total absence of petticoats. [Oct. 3rd, 1803.]

The fugitive and mercurial matter, of which a *Lady's blush* is made, after coursing from its natural position, the *cheek*, to the *tip* of the elbow, and thence diverging for a time to the *knee*, has finally settled in the *legs*, where, in the form of a pair of *red hose*, it combines with the posture and situation of *the times*, to put on a most *warlike* and *martial appearance*. [Oct. 8th, 1803.]

A species of *scarlet fever* seems not only to have infected the *ladies' legs*; but, if we may judge from their constant attendance on the volunteers, their *heads* and *hearts* are affected with the same disorder. [Oct. 22nd, 1803.]

FASHIONS. Hats, bonnets, pelises, spencers, for the grave autumnal season, all made of *velvet black*, figuring *smooth speech* and sober thoughts, two "excellent gifts in woman." [Oct. 24th, 1803.]

BARTRAM, who, as a *traveller*, was possessed of a very *lively fancy*, describes vast plains in the interior of America, where his *horse's fetlocks* for miles were dyed a perfect blood colour, in the juice of the wild strawberries. A less ardent fancy than BARTRAM'S may apply this beautiful phenomenon of summer, to solve the present *strawberry appearance* of the *female leg* this autumn in England. [Nov. 2nd, 1803.]

The *roseate tint*, so agreeably diffused through the silk stockings of our females, induces the belief that the *dye is cast* for their lovers. [Nov. 3rd, 1803.]

Curiosity is on tip-toe for the arrival of ELPHY BEY'S fair *Circassian Ladies*. The attraction of their *naturally-placed, fine, proverbial bloom*, is only wanting, to

reduce the wandering colour in the "elbows" and "ankles" of our *belles*, back to its native *metropolis* and *palace*, the "cheek." [Nov. 9th, 1803.]

The *red lights* of his *mistress's stockings* are enough to set a poor lover *beside himself*;

Like Pentheus, when distracted with his fear,  
He saw *two suns* and double Thebes appear. [Nov. 11th, 1803.]

The poets have always been lovers of good liquor from the times of ANACREON and BEN JONSON downwards; hence they are sometimes termed in derision dram-atists. [Nov. 12th, 1803.]

*Pink stockings* beneath *dark pelices* are emblems of *Sincerity* and *Discretion*; signifying a *warm heart* beneath a *cool exterior*. [Nov. 22nd, 1803.]

The decline of red stockings is as fatal to the wits, as the going out of a fashion to an overstocked jeweller; some of these gentry have literally for some months past *fed on roses*. [Nov. 29th, 1803.]

It was prettily sung of the *Bride*, in a ballad "upon a wedding":

Her *feet* beneath her *petticoat*  
Like *little mice* stole *in* and *out*,  
As if they fear'd the light.

These *little mice* (if long quarters go on improving) will in time contrive to get out of their *old trap* the *shoe*. They have begun to exhibit shrewd symptoms of *peeping*. [Dec. 5th, 1803.]

The licentious comments of the wits upon the Ladies' red stockings, have been to that innocent fashion "as killing as the canker to the *ROSE*." [Dec. 12th, 1803.]

SHAKESPEARE finely contrasts the "rich jewel" with the "*Ethiop's ear*," MILTON the "white silken turbans" of his Indian ambassadors with their "dusk faces." A more beautiful juxta-position remained to be tried in the ornaments of *jet* illustrating the *clear white skin* of a modern fashionable beauty. [Dec. 17th, 1803.]

Yellow straw hats "turned up with black," are beginning to be fashionable; like that *flower* which MILTON in *Lycidas* speaks of,

. . . on the edge  
Inscribed with woe. [Dec. 19th, 1803.]

The fashion of red stockings, so much cried down, dispraised, and followed, is on the eve of departing, to be consigned to the family tomb of "all the fashions," where sleep in peace the *ruffs* and *hoops*, and *fardingales* of past centuries; and

All its beauty, all its pomp, decays,  
Like *Courts removing*, or like *ending plays*. [Dec. 21st, 1803.]

The *long-quartered* shoes and the *tight drapery* contribute equally to display the foot and ankle to advantage. The *pink stockings* have fallen into disuse, probably because they exhibited the appearance of a *blush* on the part for the *exposure*. [Dec. 24th, 1803.]

In the humorous list of CURLL's authors, we meet with "a Pindaric writer in red stockings." *Feet of equal length* are thought to *show off* best in them now-a-days. [Dec. 28th, 1803.]

SHAKESPEARE'S AMOURS. The French, *jealous* of our *old Bard*, scandalously hint at his *too great familiarity* with NATURE. [Dec. 29th, 1803.]

There are fewer signs of Lamb's hand in 1804, and we know from a letter of Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart in May of that year that for the second time he had ceased to contribute. This time his severance of connection was final. On February 7th, 1804, was printed the following "Epitaph upon a young lady who lived neglected and died obscure," signed C. L. :—

Under this cold marble stone  
Lie the sad remains of one  
Who, when alive, by few or none  
Was lov'd, as lov'd she might have been,  
If she prosp'rous days had seen,  
Or had thriving been, I ween.  
Only this cold funeral stone  
Tells, she was beloved by one,  
Who on the marble graves his moan.

These lines Lamb had written two years previously, upon Mary Druitt, a young friend of Rickman's, who died at the age of nineteen, at Wimborne.

Among the paragraphs between January and May, which I think may be Lamb's, are these :—

Two very *rich lines* of an old poet, describing a garden-life, paint the adventures of the Prince in *Cinderella* :

Stumbling on *mellons*, as I pass,  
*Ensnared* with *flowers*, I fall on grass. [Jan. 11th, 1804.]

A pert Grammarian being told that a certain young Lady understood Latin, asked her if she understood "*Propria quæ maribus*"—"Yes, Sir," replied she, "and an *ass*, 'in presenti.'" [April 18th, 1804.]

Lamb often quotes Marvell, and he tells us more than once that the quip "*ass in præsentis* makes a wise man *in futuro*" was a favourite joke of James Boyer's at Christ's Hospital. The reference in the first paragraph is to Harriet Mellon, who nearly three years later played in Lamb's "Mr. H."

On September 28th, 1805, Lamb tells Wordsworth that he lost his newspaper work at "the beginning of last year;" but probably it was in April or May. In telling Sarah Stoddart about it Mary Lamb adds, "What we dreaded as an evil has proved a great blessing, for we have both strangely recovered our health and spirits since this has happened."

So far as we know Lamb never became a journalist again, if we except the political epigrams he contributed to the *Examiner* and *Champion* in 1812 and 1819.



## CHAPTER XIX

1802

A Peer in Lamb's Rooms—*John Woodvil* Published—Its Reception by the Critics—The Lambs among the Lakes—Wordsworth and Lamb at Bartholomew Fair—Thomas Holcroft—Children's Books.

THE first letter to Rickman in 1802, dated January 9th, shows us the Lambs in high society. "Dyer has at last met with a madman more mad than himself—the Earl of Buchan, brother to the Erskines and eccentric biographer of Fletcher of Saltoun. This old man of near eighty is come to London on his way to France, and George and he go about everywhere. George brought the mad Lord up to see me—I wasn't at home but Mary was washing—a pretty pickle to receive an Earl in! Lord have mercy upon us! a Lord in my garret! My utmost ambition was some time or other to receive a Secretary! Well, I am to breakfast with this mad Lord on Sunday. I am studying manners. George and my Lord of Buchan went on Thursday last to Richmond in the Long Coach to pay their devotions to the shrine of Thomson! The coldest day in the year. Enough to cool a Jerusalem-Padder. George is as proud as a Turkey Cock and can talk of nothing else; always taking care to hedge in at the end that he don't value Lords, and that the Earl has nothing of the Lord about him. O human nature! human nature! for my part I have told every Body, how I had an Earl come to see me. . . ."

At the beginning of 1802, or possibly the end of 1801, Lamb was doing a very reckless thing—printing *John Woodvil* at his own expense. He tells Rickman, who seems to have offered a loan or a donation, in these words: "I sincerely thank you for your repeated offer, but I have just received as much as £50, an old debt which I told you of, and that will a good deal and more than cover the expences of printing."

The play was published in February, and Lamb, as he told Mr. Fuller Russell in 1834, lost £25 by it. In the same slender volume were the Imitations of Burton and a little verse, including Mary Lamb's ballad of "Helen." We have from time to time seen what Lamb's friends thought of his play. In so far as it is considered as drama, it must be confessed to be a failure and Southey's epithet "lukewarm" just; but *John Woodvil* has many beauties and an unfailling distinction of style. Lamb alone could have written it, not only by reason of its characteristic and curiously successful archaisms, but also because no other mind was so steeped in the Elizabethan writers, but for whom *John Woodvil* could never have existed. Lamb's was not a dramatic talent, fine and sure critic though he was of the drama of others; nor except very occasionally had he the art, fine and sure critic as he was of the melody of other poets, of making music for himself. The broken irregular unrhymed lines of the play often defy scansion; yet the following lyrical passage should endure as long as any of his poetry:—

## SIR WALTER

Fie upon it.

All men are false, I think. The date of love  
Is out, expired, its stories all grown stale,  
O'erpast, forgotten, like an antique tale  
Of Hero and Leander.

## SIMON

I have known some men that are too general-contemplative for the narrow passion. I am in some sort a *general* lover.

## MARGARET

In the name of the boy God, who plays at hood-man-blind with the Muses, and cares not whom he catches: what is it *you* love?

## SIMON

Simply, all things that live,  
From the crook'd worm to man's imperial form,  
And God-resembling likeness. The poor fly,  
That makes short holyday in the sun beam,  
And dies by some child's hand. The feeble bird  
With little wings, yet greatly venturous  
In the upper sky. The fish in th' other element,  
That knows no touch of eloquence. What else?  
Yon tall and elegant stag,  
Who paints a dancing shadow of his horns  
In the water, where he drinks.

## MARGARET

I myself love all these things, yet so as with a difference:—for example, some animals better than others, some men rather than other men; the nightingale before the cuckoo, the swift and graceful palfrey before the slow and asinine mule. Your humour goes to confound all qualities.

What sports do you use in the forest?

## SIMON

Not many; some few, as thus:—  
 To see the sun to bed, and to arise,  
 Like some hot amourist with glowing eyes,  
 Bursting the lazy bands of sleep that bound him,  
 With all his fires and travelling glories round him.  
 Sometimes the moon on soft night clouds to rest,  
 Like beauty nestling in a young man's breast,  
 And all the winking stars, her handmaids, keep  
 Admiring silence, while those lovers sleep.  
 Sometimes outstretcht, in very idleness,  
 Nought doing, saying little, thinking less,  
 To view the leaves, thin dancers upon air,  
 Go eddying round; and small birds, how they fare,  
 When mother Autumn fills their beaks with corn,  
 Filch'd from the careless Amalthea's horn;  
 And how the woods berries and worms provide  
 Without their pains, when earth has nought beside  
 To answer their small wants.  
 To view the graceful deer come tripping by,  
 Then stop, and gaze, then turn, they know not why,  
 Like bashful youngers in society.  
 To mark the structure of a plant or tree,  
 And all fair things of earth, how fair they be.

## MARGARET

(Smiling.) And, afterwards them paint in simile.

*John Woodvil* was not well received by the critics. The *Edinburgh Review* made heavy fun of it, and the *Annual Review* turned it to ridicule, ending a destructive and contemptuous criticism with the words, "What precious nonsense! but this is a specimen of that canting, whining style, or rather *slang* of poetry, which is now-a-days offered to us as the very essence of simplicity and pathos!"

In a letter in December, 1803, Southey told Lieut. Southey that Mrs. Barbauld wrote this "infamous account of Lamb's play;" and in a letter to Coleridge in March, 1804, he asked, "Why have you not made Lamb declare war upon Mrs. Barbauld? He should singe her flaxen wig with squibs, and tie



crackers to her petticoats till she leapt about like a parched pea for very torture. There is not a man in the world who could so well revenge himself." Lamb, however, took no steps, showing his usual composure in the face of a failure. Later, as we shall see, he became friendly with Mrs. Barbauld and the Aikins, and then learned that the author of the *Hymns in Prose* had not been his censor after all.

Early in 1802 Lamb lost Manning, who went to Paris to study Chinese under Dr. Hagan. We have seen also that in the middle of February he ceased to write for the *Morning Post*. Beyond these two events nothing of any importance happened until August, when Lamb and his sister paid an impulsive visit to Coleridge at Keswick. Their adventures are told in the letter to Manning of September 24th: "Since the date of my last letter, I have been a traveller. A strong desire seized me of visiting remote regions. My first impulse was to go and see Paris. It was a trivial objection to my aspiring mind, that I did not understand a word of the language, since I certainly intend some time in my life to see Paris, and equally certainly never intend to learn the language; therefore that could be no objection. However, I am very glad I did not go, because you had left Paris (I see) before I could have set out. I believe Stoddart promising to go with me another year prevented that plan. My next scheme, (for to my restless, ambitious mind London was become a bed of thorns) was to visit the far-famed peak in Derbyshire, where the Devil sits, they say, without breeches. *This* my purer mind rejected as indelicate. And my final resolve was a tour to the Lakes.

"I set out with Mary to Keswick, without giving Coleridge any notice; for my time being precious did not admit of it. He received us with all the hospitality in the world, and gave up his time to show us all the wonders of the country. He dwells upon a small hill by the side of Keswick, in a comfortable house, quite enveloped on all sides by a net of mountains: great floundering bears and monsters they seemed, all couchant and asleep. We got in in the evening, travelling in a post-chaise from Penrith, in the midst of a gorgeous sunshine, which transmuted all the mountains into colours, purple, &c. &c. We thought we had got into fairyland. But that went off (as it never came again—while we stayed we had no more fine sunsets); and we entered

Coleridge's comfortable study just in the dusk, when the mountains were all dark with clouds upon their heads. Such an impression I never received from objects of sight before, nor do I suppose I can ever again. Glorious creatures, fine old fellows, Skiddaw, &c. I never shall forget ye, how ye lay about that night, like an intrenchment; gone to bed, as it seemed for the night, but promising that ye were to be seen in the morning. Coleridge had got a blazing fire in his study; which is a large, antique, ill-shaped room, with an old-fashioned organ, never played upon, big enough for a church, shelves of scattered folios, an Æolian harp, and an old sofa, half-bed, &c. And all looking out upon the last fading view of Skiddaw and his broad-breasted brethren: what a night!

“Here we stayed three full weeks, in which time I visited Wordsworth's cottage, where we stayed a day or two with the Clarksons (good people and most hospitable, at whose house we tarried one day and night), and saw Lloyd. The Wordsworths were gone to Calais. They have since been in London and past much time with us: he is now gone into Yorkshire to be married. . . . So we have seen Keswick, Grasmere, Ambleside. Ulswater (where the Clarksons live), and a place at the other end of Ulswater—I forget the name—to which we travelled on a very sultry day, over the middle of Helvellyn. We have clambered up to the top of Skiddaw, and I have waded up the bed of Lodore. In fine, I have satisfied myself, that there is such a thing as that which tourists call *romantic*, which I very much suspected before: they make such a spluttering about it, and toss their splendid epithets around them, till they give as dim a light as at four o'clock next morning the lamps do after an illumination. Mary was excessively tired, when she got about half-way up Skiddaw, but we came to a cold rill (than which nothing can be imagined more cold, running over cold stones), and with the reinforcement of a draught of cold water she surmounted it most manfully. Oh, its fine black head, and the bleak air atop of it, with a prospect of mountains all about, and about, making you giddy; and then Scotland afar off, and the border countries so famous in song and ballad! It was a day that will stand out, like a mountain, I am sure, in my life.

“But I am returned (I have now been come home near three weeks—I was a month out), and you cannot conceive the degra-

dation I felt at first, from being accustomed to wander free as air among mountains, and bathe in rivers without being controlled by any one, to come home and *work*. I felt very *little*. I had been dreaming I was a very great man. But that is going off, and I find I shall conform in time to that state of life to which it has pleased God to call me. Besides, after all, Fleet-Street and the Strand are better places to live in for good and all than among Skiddaw. Still, I turn back to those great places where I wandered about, participating in their greatness. After all, I could not *live* in Skiddaw. I could spend a year—two, three years among them, but I must have a prospect of seeing Fleet-Street at the end of that time, or I should mope and pine away, I know. Still, Skiddaw is a fine creature.”

Barry Cornwall tells us that on being asked how he felt when amongst the lakes and mountains of Cumberland, Lamb replied that he was obliged to think of the Ham and Beef shop near Saint Martin's Lane in order to bring his thoughts from their almost too painful elevation to the sober regions of everyday life. And Leigh Hunt somewhere remarks that Lamb stopped him in the midst of a beautiful country lane to point out how inferior it was to Wardour Street.

Wordsworth had left Grasmere with his sister in July; they passed through London, and on the last day of the month he wrote the sonnet on Westminster Bridge; they then stayed at Calais for a while, and returning to England at the end of August, Wordsworth saw Lamb and accompanied him to Bartholomew Fair. On October 4th, 1802, he was married to Mary Hutchinson.

Later in the same letter Lamb touches upon other matters, but his words about himself must not, I think, be taken too literally. “My habits are changing, I think, i.e. from drunk to sober. Whether I shall be happier or not remains to be proved. I shall certainly be more happy in a morning; but whether I shall not sacrifice the fat, and the marrow, and the kidneys, i.e. the night, the glorious care-drowning night, that heals all our wrongs, pours wine into our mortifications, changes the scene from indifferent and flat to bright and brilliant!—O Manning, if I should have formed a diabolical resolution, by the time you come to England, of not admitting any spirituous liquors into my house, will you be my guest on such shameworthy terms? Is life, with such



limitations, worth trying? The truth is, that my liquors bring a nest of friendly harpies about my house, who consume me. This is a pitiful tale to be read at St. Gothard; but it is just now nearest my heart. Fenwick is a ruined man. He is hiding himself from his creditors, and has sent his wife and children into the country. Fell, my other drunken companion (that has been: *nam hic cæstus artemque repono*), is turned editor of a 'Naval Chronicle.' Godwin (with a pitiful artificial wife) continues a steady friend, though the same facility does not remain of visiting him often. That bitch Mrs. Godwin has detached Marshall from his house, Marshall the man who went to sleep when the 'Ancient Mariner' was reading: the old, steady, unalterable friend of the Professor."

The letter also mentions, for the first time, Thomas Holcroft, the dramatist, with whom Lamb seems to have been upon some terms of intimacy and whose life Hazlitt afterwards wrote. Holcroft was a man of advanced views. He had been imprisoned for high treason in 1794 with Hardy, Horne Tooke, Thelwall, and seven others, and had suffered in other ways for his beliefs and want of beliefs. In his open Letter to Southey in 1823 Lamb wrote, "One of the most candid, most upright, and single-meaning men, I ever knew, was the late Thomas Holcroft. I believe he never said one thing and meant another, in his life; and, as near as I can guess, he never acted otherwise than with the most scrupulous attention to conscience. Ought we to wish the character false, for the sake of a hollow compliment to Christianity?" Holcroft is to-day known to playgoers only by the occasional revival in the provinces of his "Road to Ruin," and to readers of poetical collections by his ballad of "Gaffer Gray," the philosophy of which would be quite to Lamb's taste:—

## GAFFER GRAY

Ho, why dost thou shiver and shake,  
Gaffer Gray?  
And why does thy nose look so blue;  
" 'Tis the weather that's cold,  
'Tis I'm grown very old,  
And my doublet is not very new,  
Well-a-day!"

Then line thy worn doublet with ale,  
 Gaffer Gray;  
 And warm thy old heart with a glass.  
 "Nay, but credit I've none,  
 And my money's all gone;  
 Then say how may that come to pass?  
 Well-a-day!"

Hie away to the house on the brow,  
 Gaffer Gray;  
 And knock at the jolly priest's door.  
 "The priest often preaches  
 Against worldly riches,  
 But ne'er gives a mite to the poor,  
 Well-a-day!"

The lawyer lives under the hill,  
 Gaffer Gray;  
 Warmly fenced both in back and in front.  
 "He will fasten his locks,  
 And will threaten the stocks  
 Should he ever more find me in want,  
 Well-a-day!"

The squire has fat beeves and brown ale,  
 Gaffer Gray;  
 And the season will welcome you there.  
 "His fat beeves and his beer,  
 And his merry new year,  
 Are all for the flush and the fair,  
 Well-a-day!"

My keg is but low, I confess,  
 Gaffer Gray;  
 What then? While it lasts, man, we'll live.  
 "The poor man alone,  
 When he hears the poor moan,  
 Of his morsel a morsel will give,  
 Well-a-day!"

We see very little of Holcroft in the letters; but Lamb in one place accuses him of dulness in company. He died in 1809 at the age of sixty-four, and his widow married James Kenney, another dramatist-friend of Lamb's. With Mrs. Kenney and with Holcroft's daughters, Fanny and Louisa (afterwards Mrs. Badams), Lamb continued on friendly terms to the end.

The letter to Coleridge on October 23rd tells of the death of Sam Le Grice, and shows Lamb beginning to take seriously the question of children's books, not, I think, with any view of writing one, but as possible gifts for Hartley Coleridge. "Mrs.

Barbauld's stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery ; and the shopman at Newbery's hardly deign'd to reach them off an old exploded corner of a shelf, when Mary ask'd for them. Mrs. B.'s and Mrs. Trimmer's nonsense lay in piles about. Knowledge insignificant and vapid as Mrs. B.'s books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the *shape of knowledge*, and his empty noddle must be turned with conceit of his own powers when he has learnt that a Horse is an animal, and Billy is better than a Horse, and such like ; instead of that beautiful Interest in wild tales which made the child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a child. Science has succeeded to Poetry no less in the little walks of children than with men. Is there no possibility of averting this sore evil ? Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old wives' fables in childhood, you had been crammed with geography and natural history ? ”

It is probably no more than a chance coincidence that Lamb goes on to praise Chapman's Homer, which he had just read—the book that was to provide him with the material for one of his own books for children, the *Adventures of Ulysses*.

The same letter suggests that Coleridge had arranged with Lamb that he should make some versified translations—probably from the German, the text of which Coleridge would supply in literal prose—to be sent to the *Morning Post*. But the plan did not come to anything. Lamb says, in connection with it, “If I could but get 50*l.* a year only, in addition to what I have, I should live in affluence.”



## CHAPTER XX

1803

Captain Burney—"Sarah Battle"—Martin Burney—Colonel Phillips—William Ayrton—Whist-Table Jokes—Manning's Chinese Projects—Hester Savory—Coleridge at 16 Mitre Court Buildings—Smoking—Lamb and Dr. Parr—Mary Lamb's Gossip—Enter Sarah Stoddart—Mary Lamb's Good Sense—Talfourd's Testimony—Lamb's Difficulties in Reviewing.

WITH 1803 came more new friends into the Lamb circle—the Burneys. Captain James Burney (as he then was, Rear-Admiral Burney as he came to be) was in that year fifty-three, home from the sea for ever, and living at 26 Little James Street, Pimlico. He was just beginning his *History of the Discoveries in the South Sea*, in five volumes, which he did not finish until 1817, possibly because of a too intense devotion to whist. The captain, who was the son of Dr. Charles Burney, the historian of music and friend of Johnson, and therefore brother of Fanny Burney (then Madame D'Arbly), author of *Evelina*, had a fine record at his back: sailing with Captain Cook on his second and third voyage, being present at the great navigator's death, and returning as commander of the famous *Discovery*. In 1783, as captain of the *Bristol*, of fifty guns, he fought under Sir Edward Hughes in the East Indies. Lamb describes him to Manning on February 19th as a "merry natural captain" who once made a pun in the Otaheité language—a better recommendation as a companion than all his honours of exploration or of war. Burney further endeared himself to Lamb by the remark that he liked Shakespeare because he was "so much the gentleman."

There is good reason for believing that in Sarah Burney, the captain's wife, Lamb found the original of Sarah Battle; but he may have superimposed some alien characteristics. "'A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game.' This was the celebrated *wish* of old Sarah Battle (now with God), who, next

to her devotions, loved a good game at whist. She was none of your lukewarm gamesters, your half and half players, who have no objection to take a hand, if you want one to make up a rubber ; who affirm that they have no pleasure in winning ; that they like to win one game and lose another ; that they can while away an hour very agreeably at a card-table, but are indifferent whether they play or no ; and will desire an adversary, who has slipped a wrong card, to take it up and play another. These insufferable triflers are the curse of a table. One of these flies will spoil a whole pot. Of such it may be said, that they do not play at cards, but only play at playing at them.

“Sarah Battle was none of that breed. She detested them, as I do, from her heart and soul ; and would not, save upon a striking emergency, willingly seat herself at the same table with them. She loved a thorough-paced partner, a determined enemy. She took, and gave no concessions. She hated favours. She never made a revoke, nor ever passed it over in her adversary without exacting the utmost forfeiture. She fought a good fight : cut and thrust. . . .” And so forth ; the essay is known to all.

Of Mrs. Burney in her own person we see but little in Lamb’s correspondence ; but her son Martin Charles Burney for the most part passed intimately into the Lambs’ life—in these early days, perhaps, rather as a half-pathetic disciple than an intellectual companion. I have not succeeded in learning as much of Martin Burney as I should like ; but this we know, that he was to the end intensely devoted to Charles and Mary Lamb and that the Lambs always had his well-being very near their hearts. In 1803 he was a boy of fifteen.

We have a picture of Martin Burney in a letter from Southey to Coleridge on June 11th, 1804 : “The captain hath a son—begotten, according to Lamb, upon a mermaid ; and thus far is certain, that he is the queerest fish out of water. A paralytic affection in childhood has kept one side of his face stationary, while the other has continued to grow, and the two sides form the most ridiculous whole you can imagine ; the boy, however, is a sharp lad, the inside not having suffered.” Procter in his *Memoir of Lamb* thus describes him : “The man whom I found at Lamb’s house more frequently than any other person was Martin Burney. . . . His face was warped by pa.alysis,

which affected one eye and one side of his mouth. He was plain and unaffected in manner, very diffident and retiring; yet pronouncing his opinions, when asked to do so, without apology or hesitation. He was a barrister; and travelled the western circuit at the same time as Sir Thomas Wilde (afterwards Lord Truro), whose briefs he used to read before the other considered them; marking out the principal facts and points for attention. Martin Burney had excellent taste in books; eschewed the showy and artificial, and looked into the sterling qualities of writing. He frequently accompanied Lamb in his visits to friends, and although very familiar with Charles, he always spoke of him, with respect, as *Mr. Lamb*. . . . The last time I saw Burney was at the corner of a street in London, when he was overflowing on the subject of Raffaele and Hogarth. After a great and prolonged struggle, he said, he had arrived at the conclusion that Raffaele was the greater man of the two."

Leigh Hunt, in the *London Journal*, tells this story: "'How obstinate M. B. is,' observed a visitor. 'He's an excellent fellow,' said Lamb, avoiding the point: 'I like M.'—'But he's so obstinate,' reiterated the speaker. 'Well,' replied Lamb, 'I like a good solid obstinacy. Something may come of it. Besides,—there's something to quarrel with. One's blows don't tell upon a fellow who goes whisking about like a ball of worsted, and won't stand up for his own opinion. M.'s a freeholder, and insists upon having his vote.'" Martin's nature was so simple and loving, his character so true, as to draw from Lamb the beautiful tribute in the dedication of the prose portion of his *Works* in 1818:—

In all my threadings of this worldly maze,  
(And I have watched thee almost from a child),  
Free from self-seeking, envy, low design,  
I have not found a whiter soul than thine.

And in one of his letters Lamb says of Burney that he is "on the top scale of my friendship ladder, on which an angel or two is still climbing."

Of Martin's oddities there is an amusing glimpse in a letter to Sarah Hazlitt in 1830: "Martin Burney is as odd as ever. We had a dispute about the word 'heir,' which I contended was pronounced like 'air;,' he said that might be in common parlance; or that we might so use it, speaking of the 'Heir-at-Law,'



a comedy; but that in the Law Courts it was necessary to give it a full aspiration, and to say *Hayer*; he thought it might even vitiate a cause, if a Counsel pronounced it otherwise. In conclusion, he 'would consult Serjeant Wilde;' who gave it against him. Sometimes he falleth into the water, sometimes into the fire. He came down here, and insisted on reading Virgil's 'Eneid' all through with me (which he did,) because a Counsel must know Latin. Another time he read out all the Gospel of St. John, because Biblical quotations are very emphatic in a Court of Justice. A third time, he would carve a fowl, which he did very ill-favoredly, because 'we did not know how indispensable it was for a Barrister to do all those sort of things well. Those little things were of more consequence than we supposed.' So he goes on, harassing about the way to prosperity, and losing it. With a long head, but somewhat a wrong one—harum-scarum. Why does not his guardian angel look to him? He deserves one—may be he has tired him out."

From time to time we shall see Martin Burney in these pages; but I might say here that in later years he came upon much misfortune, through inherent weakness and an ill-advised marriage. Towards the close of Lamb's life his figure becomes dim and is then lost until Mary Lamb's funeral in 1847, where he was inconsolable. He died in 1853. No line of correspondence between the Lambs and himself has been preserved.

Colonel Phillips, Captain Burney's brother-in-law, who had also sailed with Cook and known Dr. Johnson, was among the new friends, while yet another who came in with the Burneys was William Ayrton, the musical critic. Ayrton, whom Hazlitt calls, in one of his essays, "the Will Honeycomb of our set," was born in 1777 and was thus by two years Lamb's junior. He was the son of Dr. Edmund Ayrton, the musician, and was for some time the Director of the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, where he produced Mozart's "Don Giovanni" in 1817. His wife was Marianne Arnold, daughter of Dr. Arnold, the composer, and sister of S. J. Arnold of the Lyceum Theatre, then known as the English Opera House, where Miss Kelly played. Arnold married Miss Pye, daughter of the Poet-Laureate, but there is no record that Lamb and her father ever met. The Ayrtons were neighbours of the Burneys in Little James Street, their number being 24; and apart from the ordinary amenities

of friendship the part played by them in the life of Lamb and his sister was destined to be very important by reason of the circumstance that Mrs. Paris, of Cambridge, at whose house the Lambs first saw Emma Isola, was Ayrton's sister.

William Ayrton's admiration of Lamb's genius caused him to prepare the volume of blank pages bound to match the two volumes of the *Works* of 1818, from which I have quoted some mock Latin on page 176. In this he copied or pasted a number of Lamb's later writings in prose and verse (together with two or three pieces that have turned out not to be Lamb's). William Scrope Ayrton, Ayrton's son, records that when Lamb was shown the volume, then blank, he remarked that it was the greatest compliment that had ever been paid him.

Lamb's well-known remark to Martin Burney at the card table—"If dirt was trumps what a hand you'd hold!"—is also attributed to Ayrton; indeed it is called his only joke.<sup>1</sup> On another whist evening Ayrton, after taking a trick by trumping, remarked in triumph, "When Greek meets Greek then comes the tug of war." "But when you meet Greek," said Lamb, "you can't read it."

On February 19th, 1803, Lamb received a blow—a letter from Manning announcing that he was proposing to settle in Independent Tartary. Manning had been out of England for some time, and was thus little in Lamb's actual life, but it is one thing to have a friend so near as France and another so far as Tartary, and under cover of his levity Lamb probably felt the threatened separation very keenly. He seems to have dashed off his famous reply instantly. "Read Sir John Maundevill's travels to cure you, or come over to England. There is a Tartar-man now exhibiting at Exeter Change. Come and talk with him, and hear what he says first. Indeed, he is no very favorable specimen of his Countrymen! But perhaps the best thing you can do, is to *try* to get the idea out of your head. For this purpose repeat to yourself every night, after you have said your prayers, the words Independent Tartary, Independent Tartary, two or three times, and associate with them the *idea of oblivion* ('tis Hartley's method with obstinate memories), or say, Independent, Inde-

<sup>1</sup> Kenney the dramatist told Tom Moore that Lamb used the words to Elliston. Possibly he made the joke more than once; he repeats his good things in his letters.

pendent, have I not already got an *Independence*? That was a clever way of the old puritans—pun-divinity. My dear friend, think what a sad pity it would be to bury such *parts* in heathen countries, among nasty, unconvertible, horse-belching, Tartar people! Some say, they are Cannibals; and then conceive a Tartar-fellow *eating* my friend, and adding the *cool malignity* of mustard and vinegar!” Manning was not to be diverted from his purpose of visiting the East, but he did not leave Europe for Asia until 1806.

In his next letter to Manning Lamb copies the beautiful poem “Hester,” remarking: “I send you some verses I have made on the death of a young Quaker you may have heard me speak of as being in love with for some years while I lived at Pentonville, though I had never spoken to her in my life. She died about a month since. . . .”

When maidens such as Hester die  
Their place ye may not well supply,  
Though ye among a thousand try,  
With vain endeavour.

A month or more hath she been dead,  
Yet cannot I by force be led  
To think upon the wormy bed,  
And her together.

A springy motion in her gait,  
A rising step, did indicate  
Of pride and joy no common rate,  
That flush'd her spirit,

I know not by what name beside  
I shall it call:—if 'twas not pride,  
It was a joy to that allied,  
She did inherit.

Her parents held the Quaker rule,  
Which doth the human feeling cool,  
But she was trained in Nature's school,  
Nature had blest her.

A waking eye, a prying mind,  
A heart that stirs, is hard to bind,  
A hawk's keen sight ye cannot blind,  
Ye could not Hester.

My sprightly neighbour, gone before  
To that unknown and silent shore,  
Shall we not meet as heretofore,  
Some summer morning,





HESTER SAVORY

FROM THE MINIATURE IN THE POSSESSION OF MRS. BRADSWORTH, BY RENTAL.



When from thy cheerful eyes a ray  
Hath struck a bliss upon the day,  
A bliss that would not go away,  
A sweet forewarning?

Hester was Hester Savory, the daughter of Joseph Savory, a Quaker goldsmith in the Strand. She was born on May 31st, 1777—being thus two years younger than Charles Lamb—and at the time to which he refers lived with her brother and two sisters at Pentonville. She was married on July 1st, 1802, to Charles Stoke Dudley, a merchant, and died on February 9th, 1803, aged not quite twenty-six. Her grave is in Bunhill Fields; her memory will last as long as the sweetest English lyrics are read.

In the spring of the year Coleridge was in town on a brief visit, to arrange for the new edition of the *Poems* of 1796 and 1797 which Longman and Rees were to publish. The labour of seeing the book through the press occupied Lamb's evenings throughout May. While in London Coleridge made Mitre Court Buildings his home and was there the unhappy witness of one of Mary Lamb's attacks. In a letter to his wife, on April 4th, he thus describes the circumstance: "I had purposed not to speak of Mary Lamb, but I had better write it than tell it. The Thursday before last she met at Rickman's a Mr. Babb, an old friend and admirer of her Mother. The next day she smiled in an ominous way; on Sunday she told her brother that she was getting bad, with great agony. On Tuesday morning she laid hold of me with violent agitation and talked wildly about George Dyer. I told Charles there was not a moment to lose; and I did not lose a moment, but went for a hackney-coach and took her to the private mad-house at Hugsden [Hoxton]. She was quite calm, and said it was the best to do so. But she wept bitterly two or three times, yet all in a calm way; Charles is cut to the heart."

On April 13th Lamb tells Coleridge that he hopes to have his sister back in a week or two. Later in the letter he asks, "What do you think of smoking? I want your sober, *average noon opinion* of it. I generally am eating my dinner about the time I should determine it. Morning is a Girl, and can't smoke—she's no evidence one way or other; and Night is so evidently *bought over*, that *he* can't be a very upright judge. May be



the truth is, that *one* pipe is wholesome, *two* pipes toothsome, *three* pipes noisome, *four* pipes fulsome, *five* pipes quarrelsome; and that's the *sum* on't. But that is deciding rather upon rhyme than reason." Here we have the first of Lamb's many heart-searchings on the subject of tobacco, to which he was so often to bid farewell.

According to the "Confessions of a Drunkard" he was stimulated to smoke by the whist-playing set into which he had just passed from that of Fenwick and Fell. He writes, and we may, I think, consider the passage substantially true, "My next more immediate companions were and are persons of such intrinsic and felt worth, that though accidentally their acquaintance has proved pernicious to me, I do not know that if the thing were to do over again, I should have the courage to eschew the mischief at the price of forfeiting the benefit. I came to them reeking from the steams of my late over-heated notions of companionship; and the slightest fuel which they unconsciously afforded, was sufficient to feed my old fires into a propensity.

"They were no drinkers; but, one from professional habits, and another from a custom derived from his father, smoked tobacco. The devil could not have devised a more subtle trap to re-take a backsliding penitent. The transition, from gulping down draughts of liquid fire to puffing out innocuous blasts of dry smoke, was so like cheating him. But he is too hard for us when we hope to commute. He beats us at barter; and when we think to set off a new failing against an old infirmity, 'tis odds but he puts the trick upon us of two for one. That (comparatively) white devil of tobacco brought with him in the end seven worse than himself." A glance at the commentary on the "Confessions of a Drunkard" in Chapter XXVIII. will show that I do not consider them to be an unvarnished statement of fact; but that they are substantially founded is, I think, evident, and we have a portion of the truth here.

Lamb seems to have smoked with extraordinary fervour. Talfourd tells us that when Dr. Parr,—“who took only the finest tobacco, used to half fill his pipe with salt, and smoked with a philosophical calmness,—saw Lamb smoking the strongest preparation of the weed, puffing out smoke like some furious Enchanter, he gently laid down his pipe, and asked him, how he had acquired his power of smoking at such a rate? Lamb re-

plied, 'I toiled after it, sir, as some men toil after virtue.'" The occasion of this meeting between the essayist and the sturdy old Whig I have not discovered; but it is a pleasant story and I hope true.

A gossiping letter from Mary Lamb to Dorothy Wordsworth, written on July 9th, tells that she was quite herself again and gives us more information about the Lambs' friends. "I have been in better health and spirits this week past than since my last illness—I continued so long so very weak & dejected I began to fear I should never be at all comfortable again I strive against low spirits all I can, but it is a very hard thing to get the better of.

"I am very uneasy about poor Coleridge, his last letters are very melancholy ones. Remember me affectionately to him and Sara, I hope you often see him.

"Southey is in town, he seems as proud of his little girl as I suppose your brother is of his boy, he says his home is now quite a different place to what it used to be—I was glad to hear him say this—it used to look rather cheerless. [Southey once said that no house was perfect unless it had in it a child rising six years and a kitten rising six months.]

"We went last week with Southey and Rickman and his sister to Sadlers Wells, the lowest and most London-like of all our London amusements. The entertainments were Goody Two Shoes, Jack the Giant Killer, and *Mary of Buttermere!* Poor Mary was very happily married at the end of the piece, to a sailor her former sweetheart. We had a prodigious fine view of her father's house in the vale of Buttermere—mountains very like large haycocks, and a lake like nothing at all. If you had been with us, would you have laughed the whole time like Charles and Miss Rickman, or gone to sleep as Southey and Rickman did?

"Stoddart is in expectation of going soon to Malta as Judge's Advocate: it is likely to be a profitable situation, fifteen hundred a year or more. If he goes he takes with him his sister, and, as I hear from her as a very great secret, a *wife*; you must not mention this because if he stays in England he may not be rich enough to marry for some years. I do not know why I should trouble you with a secret which it seems I am unable to keep myself and which is of no importance to you to hear. . . .

“Charles is very well and very *good*—I mean very sober, but he is very good in every sense of the word, for he has been very kind and patient with me, and I have been a sad trouble to him lately. He has shut out all his friends because he thought company hurt me, and done every thing in his power to comfort and amuse me. We are to go out of town soon for a few weeks, when I hope I shall get quite stout and lively.

“You saw Fenwick when you was with us—perhaps you remember his wife and children were with his brother, a tradesman at Penzance. He (the brother) who was supposed to be in a great way of business, has become a bankrupt; they are now at Penzance without a home and without money, and poor Fenwick, who has been Editor of a country newspaper lately, is likely soon to be quite out of employ; I am distressed for them, for I have a great affection for Mrs. Fenwick.

“How pleasant your little house and orchard must be now. I almost wish I had never seen it. I am always wishing to be with you. I could sit upon that little bench in idleness day long. When you have a leisure hour, a letter from [you], kind friend, will give me the greatest pleasure.

“We have money of yours and I want you to send me some commission to lay it out. Are you not in want of anything? I believe when we go out of town it will be to Margate—I love the seaside and expect much benefit from it, but your mountain scenery has spoiled us we shall find the flat country of the Isle of Thanet very dull. . . .”

According to a note to Rickman, the Lambs did not go to Margate but to the Isle of Wight and to Portsmouth, where they saw Fenwick again.

The party, which included the Burneys, stayed at Cowes, and from there Captain Burney and Lamb sent Rickman a joint letter on July 27th. The captain writes: “We have visited Newport and Carisbrook Castle where we saw a deep well and a cross old woman. We went by water, and friend Lamb (to give a specimen of his seamanship) very ingeniously and unconsciously cast loose the fastenings of the mast, so that mast, sprit, sails, and all the rest tumbled overboard with a crash, and not less to his surprise than to the surprise of every other person in the boat.” The best thing in Lamb’s part of the letter, which is chiefly taken up with Martin’s pranks, is this: “In short nothing



in this house goes right till after supper, then a gentle circumstance of the weed serves to shut out Isle of Wight impertinent scenery and brings us back in fancy to Mutton Lane and the romantic alleys ever green of nether-Holborn, green that owes nothing to grass, but the simple effect of cabbage-water, tripecauls."

In September begins the very interesting series of letters from Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart, John Stoddart's sister, concerning that young lady's adventures among lovers; from which we get not only proof of Mary Lamb's sound and shrewd common sense and practical wisdom, but many an intimate glimpse of the Lambs' life. For example, "*Secrecy*," she writes on September 21st, "is certainly a grand failing of yours, it is likewise your *brother's* [John Stoddart's]. . . . By secrecy, I mean you both want the habit of telling each other at the moment every thing that happens—where you go,—and what you do,—the free communication of letters and opinions just as they arrive, as Charles and I do,—and which is, after all, the only groundwork of friendship."

The following passage from the same letter is even more interesting in its revelation of Mary Lamb's exceptional tolerance and sympathetic wisdom: "You will smile when I tell you I think myself the only woman in the world who could live with a brother's wife, and make a real friend of her, partly from early observation of the unhappy example I have just given you [quoted on page 17] and partly from a knack I know I have of looking into people's real characters, and never expecting them to act out of it—never expecting another to do as I would in the same case. When you leave your Mother, and say, if you never shall see her again, you shall feel no remorse; and when you make a *jewish* bargain with your *Lover*; all this gives me no offence, because it is your nature, and your temper, and I do not expect or want you to be otherwise than you are. I love you for the good that is in you, and look for no change." This surely indicates a very unusual and admirable attitude. To love our friends for the best that is in them, neither being offended by the worst nor desirous of mending it, is a state of wisdom to which few men or women attain.

And the passage is true; Mary Lamb was incapable of deceiving herself or any one else. It is a source of deep regret that so few of her letters have survived; but those that I have been able to collect exhibit sympathetic kindness, serene sense,

and transparent honesty in a degree beyond any writing that I know.

Talfourd's description of Mary Lamb may be quoted here: "Miss Lamb would have been remarkable for the sweetness of her disposition, the clearness of her understanding, and the gentle wisdom of all her acts and words, even if these qualities had not been presented in marvellous contrast with the distraction under which she suffered for weeks, latterly for months, in every year. There was no tinge of insanity discernible in her manner to the most observant eye; not even in those distressful periods when the premonitory symptoms had apprised her of its approach, and she was making preparations for seclusion. In all its essential sweetness, her character was like her brother's; while, by a temper more placid, a spirit of enjoyment more serene, she was enabled to guide, to counsel, to cheer him; and to protect him on the verge of the mysterious calamity, from the depths of which she rose so often unruffled to his side. To a friend in any difficulty she was the most comfortable of advisers, the wisest of consolers. Hazlitt used to say, that he never met with a woman who could reason, and had met with only one thoroughly reasonable—the sole exception being Mary Lamb."

Lamb's last letter of the year is to Godwin, expressing sorrow at his delay in writing a promised review of the philosopher's *Life of Chaucer*. "You, by long habits of composition and a greater command gained over your own powers, cannot conceive," says Lamb, "of the desultory and uncertain way in which I (an author by fits) sometimes cannot put the thoughts of a common letter into sane prose. Any work which I take upon myself as an engagement will act upon me to torment, *e.g.*, when I have undertaken, as three or four times I have, a school-boy copy of verses for Merchant Taylors' boys, at a guinea a copy, I have fretted over them, in perfect inability to do them, and have made my sister wretched with my wretchedness for a week together. The same, till by habit I have acquired a mechanical command, I have felt in making paragraphs. As to reviewing, in particular, my head is so whimsical a head, that I cannot, after reading another man's book, let it have been never so pleasing, give any account of it in any methodical way. I cannot follow his train. Something like this you must have perceived of me in conversation." Whether Lamb's review of the book was ever finished and printed I have not been able to discover.

## CHAPTER XXI

1804

The Unhappy Coleridge—He Leaves for Malta—Mary Lamb's Poems—Robert Lloyd's Marriage—Enter William Hazlitt—Lamb and Hazlitt Contrasted—Thomas De Quincey—Lamb in His Office—Artist Acquaintances.

THE year 1804 is remarkable for Coleridge's departure for Malta. For some time past he had been growing increasingly restless, and dissatisfied both with his home and himself: increasingly inclined to believe, like all unhappy irresolute characters, that if he could but change his environment and make a new start all would be well. In the summer of 1803 he had joined the Wordsworths on their Scotch tour—leaving them abruptly, it is conjectured to be able to drug himself unchecked, and then returning suddenly to Greta Hall, Keswick, to receive the Southey's, who were not in the least the people to soothe him in the excitable state he was then in. Mrs. Coleridge's very natural impatience with her husband was probably encouraged rather than corrected by her sister, while Southey was the last person to sympathise either with a husband who neglected his wife or a literary man who did not fulfil his engagements.

Coleridge endured Keswick under these conditions until December 20th, when he started out to consult Poole. At Ambleside, however, he fell ill and was nursed by the Wordsworths into convalescence again, when he proceeded to London, saw Poole, and then, making his headquarters with Tobin at Barnard's Inn, did a little work for Stuart on the *Courier* and prepared for his great enterprise—to join Stoddart in Malta and see if salvation lay on that or some other Southern shore.

To what extent Coleridge saw Lamb we do not know; but there is an amusing letter extant, dated February 20th, 1804, to Southey, in which Coleridge describes a furious dis-



cussion at Godwin's, ending in bad temper, which he attributes largely to the "grossness and vulgar insanocecity of this dim-headed prig of a philosophocide" and partly to the "glass of punch of most deceitful strength" which Mary Lamb had mixed for him. I do not think, however, that Lamb and Coleridge were very much together at this time, for Lamb cannot have indulged in any great hopes of the benefits to be conferred upon his friend by such an exile, and Coleridge cannot have been unaware of Lamb's want of sympathy with what after all in its nakedness was an act of evasion.

With the assistance of Rickman a ship was at last found, and Coleridge left London for Portsmouth on March 27th, and sailed on April 9th. Writing to Sarah Stoddart in Malta in March, Mary Lamb says: "I envy your brother the pleasure of seeing Coleridge drop in unexpectedly upon him; we talk—but it is but wild and idle talk—of following him: he is to get my brother some little snug place of a thousand a year, and we are to leave all, and come and live among ye. What a pretty dream.

"Coleridge is very ill. I dread the thoughts of his long voyage—write as soon as he arrives, whether he does or not, and tell me how he is. . . .

"He has got letters of recommendation to Governor Ball, and God knows who; and he will talk and talk, and be universally admired. But I wish to write for him a *letter of recommendation* to Mrs. Stoddart, and to yourself, to take upon ye, on his first arrival, to be kind affectionate nurses; and mind, now, that you perform this duty faithfully, and write me a good account of yourself. Behave to him as you would to me, or to Charles, if we came sick and unhappy to you."

Coleridge reached Valetta on May 18th.

The next letter to Sarah Stoddart contains further testimony to Mary Lamb's shrewdness: "I make a point of conscience never to interfere or cross my brother in the humour he happens to be in. It always appears to me to be a vexatious kind of Tyranny, that women have no business to exercise over men, which, merely because *they having a better judgement*, they have the power to do. Let *men* alone, and at last we find they come round to the right way, which *we*, by a kind of intuition, perceive at once. But better, far better, that we should let them

often do wrong, than that they should have the torment of a Monitor always at their elbows."

On June 2nd Lamb sends to Dorothy Wordsworth two of his sister's poems, saying, "I wish they may please you: we in these parts are not a little proud of them." I quote here (from the final text of 1818) the "Dialogue between a Mother and Child," a little poem with an indefinable charm and a sense of tragedy that more conscious art might strive after in vain:—

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A MOTHER AND CHILD

CHILD

O Lady, lay your costly robes aside,  
No longer may you glory in your pride.

MOTHER

Wherefore to-day art singing in mine ear  
Sad songs, were made so long ago, my dear;  
This day I am to be a bride, you know,  
Why sing sad songs, were made so long ago?

CHILD

O, mother, lay your costly robes aside,  
For you may never be another's bride.  
*That* line I learn'd not in the old sad song.

MOTHER

I pray thee, pretty one, now hold thy tongue,  
Play with the bride-maids, and be glad, my boy,  
For thou shalt be a second father's joy.

CHILD

One father fondled me upon his knee.  
One father is enough, alone, for me.

The other verses, on Leonardo da Vinci's "Modestia et Vanitas," will be found on page 558

In August and September the Lambs had a month's holiday at Richmond, wandering on the banks of the Thames, as he tells Robert Lloyd on September 13th: writing to congratulate him on his marriage (on August 2nd, 1804, to Hannah Hart, of Nottingham) and Priscilla Lloyd on her engagement. "All these new nuptials," he says, "do not make me unquiet in the perpetual prospect of celibacy. There is a quiet dignity in old bachelorhood, a leisure from cares, noise, etc., an enthronisation upon the armed-chair of a man's feeling that he may sit, walk,

read, unmolested, to none accountable—but hush! or I shall be torn in pieces like a churlish Orpheus by the young married women and bride-maids of Birmingham.”

A letter from Mary Lamb to Mrs. Coleridge on October 13th contains an interesting announcement and a charming passage. “I have lately been often talking of you with Mrs. Hazlitt. William Hazlitt is painting my brother’s picture, which has brought us acquainted with the whole family. I like William Hazlitt and his sister very much indeed, and I think Mrs. Hazlitt a pretty good-humoured woman. She has a nice little girl of the Pypos<sup>1</sup> kind, who is so fond of my brother that she stops strangers in the street to tell them when *Mr. Lamb is coming to see her.*”—I know of no incident in Lamb’s life, or in any one’s life, that is prettier than this.

In later chapters will be found further evidence of Lamb’s popularity with children; here it is more important to note that with this letter William Hazlitt, with whose name that of Lamb is so closely linked in English literature, enters the circle. They had met before—possibly, I think, in the early months of this year, while Coleridge was in town, for it was Coleridge (whom Hazlitt had already painted) that brought them together. The meeting place is said by Hazlitt to have been Godwin’s house, at a moment when that philosopher, Coleridge and Holcroft were discussing “man as he is and man as he ought to be.” “Give me,” interjected Lamb, who was taking little part in the debate, “give me man as he is not to be;” and Hazlitt at once realised that here was a new friend to be added to his too slender store.

Hazlitt’s twenty-seventh birthday was in April of this year; Lamb’s in February. Hazlitt, like Lamb, was the youngest of a large family, only three of whom grew up—John, Peggy and the essayist. His father was a Unitarian minister at Wem, in Shropshire; Lamb too had been brought up in a Unitarian atmosphere. In taste they had much in common: both loved literature, both loved painting, both talked well and hated cant. Both had sat in a manner at the feet of Coleridge: Lamb as we have seen, Hazlitt at Wem, in 1798, as he tells us in the essay “My First Acquaintance with Poets.” Both knew Words-

<sup>1</sup> Pypos was the pet name for Derwent Coleridge, derived from his attempts to say “Flying Opossum.”



worth, whom Hazlitt had painted on his recent northern tour; Hazlitt, according to De Quincey, had even fallen in love with Wordsworth's sister.

In 1804 Hazlitt was beginning to realise that the career of a painter was not for him—his portrait of Lamb is one of his last pictures—and he was preparing to settle down to a literary career. At the time we have reached he had already written and published his *Essay on Human Action*, and his abridgment of Tucker's *Light of Nature Revealed* was begun.

Each man was ripe for the other, and for a while their intimacy was close and cordial. But although Lamb never wavered in his admiration of Hazlitt's intellectual gifts—though he thought him in his saner moments “one of the finest spirits breathing”—Hazlitt made it very difficult for the flame of friendship to burn with any steady radiance. Indeed he made no friends in the ultimate sense of the word. He valued too much his independence, the right to say what he thought. He was one who said what was in his mind regardless of consequences, and he would never have brooked such an impediment to this luxury as a bond of love. Lamb also spoke his mind plainly, as he himself tells us; but Lamb was more catholic—he liked man as he ought not to be; and since he too had suffered, his plain speech was seldom unkind. It may often have been misunderstood, as every witty man's is certain to be, but it was never cruel. Hazlitt was critical to the uttermost fibre; he accepted nothing exactly as it was; he condemned roundly, and when he praised, praised usually by comparison. Tolerance was his bugbear. What he disliked he hated and despised. To hate may be a virtue, but to despise is a confession of failure as a philosopher and a citizen of the world; and Hazlitt's readiness to despise was his weakest point: it has kept him out of men's hearts as surely as Lamb's inability to despise has established his place there.

As Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, Hazlitt's grandson, has remarked, Lamb was too tolerant to possess Hazlitt's entire commendation. The word loyalty was not in Hazlitt's dictionary; it was in italics in Lamb's. Not that Lamb was blind to a friend's faults or unwilling to speak of them—as we saw in the letter to Rickman about George Burnett—but the faults were never allowed to alienate. Hazlitt on the contrary demanded that his friends

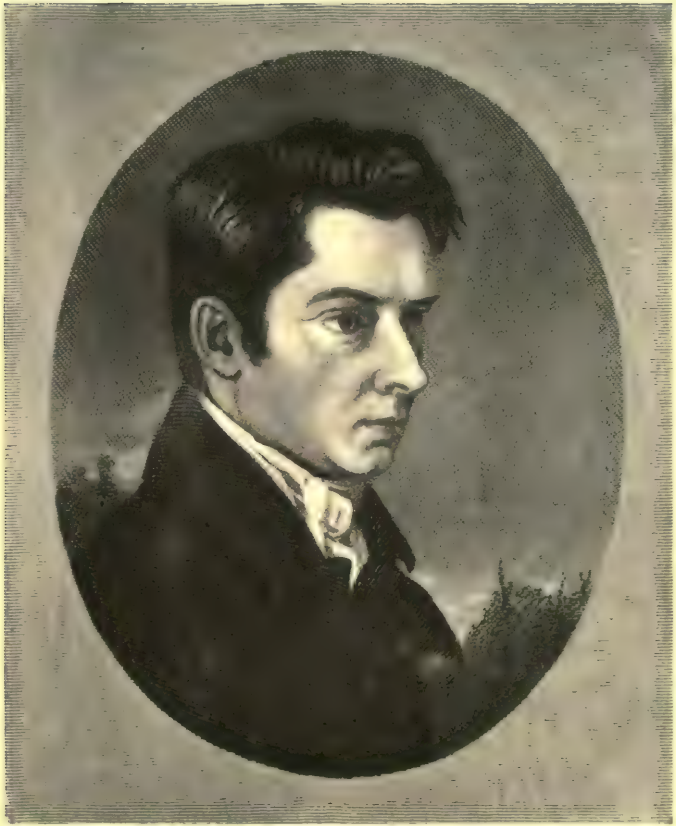
should go with him all the way: hate where he hated, praise where he praised, cut where he cut. Lamb was too much interested in his fellows to forgo their company because they held other views; he was in all the camps where whatever was interesting abode. Hazlitt had but one camp, his own.

There is a story of Lamb related by Crabb Robinson which bears upon the matter. "How I hate those Blanks!" he once remarked in Robinson's hearing. "But you have never seen them," said Robinson. "No," Lamb replied, "that's just it. That's why I hate them. I can never hate any one that I've once seen." Hazlitt on the contrary nursed his faculties of hate with the utmost care and fondness. Lamb knew that in every one was some point of sympathy if only it could be found. Hazlitt might not have denied the fact, but he preferred not to find it. It is too much to say that Lamb was social in any great degree, although he was very happy among his friends; but Hazlitt was positively anti-social.

Again, Lamb's Shakespearian mind recognised law; he kept office hours; he never ran away. Hazlitt kept no hours, recognised no laws, often ran away. Lamb had very little of the literary temperament: he was man and brother first and writer now and then; Hazlitt was steeped in ink. Naturally disposed to extreme views and uncharitable verdicts, Hazlitt nourished and fostered such defects by his plunge into politics.

Although Hazlitt may not reach the heart, his place in our heads is as secure as Lamb's. English literature possesses no acuter mind than Hazlitt's, no surer hand; yet for every reader of Hazlitt there are scores of readers of Lamb—a result which may be attributed to Hazlitt's lack of sympathetic companionableness. He says the wisest, the truest things; but there is more friendliness in a page of Lamb than in all Hazlitt's writings. Hazlitt has no tendrils; he makes us think, but he never enfolds us.

In *My Friends and Acquaintances* by P. G. Patmore, who knew both men, is this interesting passage: "From Lamb, and from Lamb alone, among all his friends and associates, Hazlitt had never received, or even suspected, except on one occasion, any of those personal slights and marks of disrespect which he did not feel or fear the less because he was conscious of often deserving them—using the phrase in its ordinary and social acceptance. From Lamb alone, his errors, extravagancies, and



WILLIAM HAZLITT (AGED 30)

FROM A MINIATURE BY JOHN HAZLITT

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inconsistencies, met with that wise and just consideration which his fine sense of the weakness no less than the strength of our human nature dictated. There was no one who spoke more *freely* of Hazlitt, whether behind his back or before his face, than Lamb did ; but Lamb never spoke *disparagingly* of him. Lamb, in canvassing the faults of his character, never failed to bear in mind, and call to mind in others, the rare and admirable qualities by which they were accompanied, and with which, it may be, they were naturally and therefore inextricably linked. No wonder, then, that Hazlitt felt towards Lamb a sentiment of personal kindness and esteem that was not extended, even in kind, to any other individual."

Lamb's remarks on Hazlitt are extremely valuable in helping to a judgment of that fine and wayward genius. They are to be found principally in the correspondence, but there is the famous reference in the open letter to Southey in 1823 : "I stood well with him for fifteen years (the proudest of my life), and have ever spoke my full mind of him to some, to whom his panegyric must naturally be least tasteful. I never in thought swerved from him, I never betrayed him, I never slackened in my admiration of him, I was the same to him (neither better nor worse) though he could not see it, as in the days when he thought fit to trust me. At this instant, he may be preparing for me some compliment, above my deserts, as he has sprinkled many such among his admirable books, for which I rest his debtor ; or, for any thing I know, or can guess to the contrary, he may be about to read a lecture on my weaknesses. He is welcome to them (as he was to my humble hearth), if they can divert a spleen, or ventilate a fit of sullenness. I wish he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does ; but the reconciliation must be effected by himself, and I despair of living to see that day. But, protesting against much that he has written, and some things which he chooses to do ; judging him by his conversation which I enjoyed so long, and relished so deeply ; or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes—I should belie my own conscience, if I said less, than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy, which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire ; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting

to find, such another companion." And in 1816 Lamb had written to Wordsworth, after mentioning an attack on himself by Hazlitt that had recently been printed: "In spite of all there is something tough in my attachment to H. which these violent strainings cannot quite dislocate or sever asunder. I get no conversation in London that is absolutely worth attending to but his."

In the winter of 1804—or possibly the beginning of 1805—Lamb first met another writer who was destined to appreciate his genius as cordially as any, and to make (for those who can extricate them from their surrounding word-brambles) some valuable contributions to his full-length portrait. This was Thomas De Quincey, then a young man of nineteen, who had already known more adventures than fall to most men in fifty years—having run away from school, starved in London with Ann, corresponded with Wordsworth, learned to eat opium, and read half the books in the world. A literary friend had given him a letter of introduction to Lamb, whom he knew as the author of *John Woodvil* and the imitations of Burton, and he presented it at the East India House. I quote in full, from "London Reminiscences," the tortuous account of this first meeting, because it is the only glimpse we have of Lamb at his work.

"But first let me describe my brief introductory call upon him at the India House. I had been told that he was never to be found at home except in the evenings; and to have called then would have been, in a manner, forcing myself upon his hospitalities, and at a moment when he might have confidential friends about him; besides that, he was sometimes tempted away to the theatres. I went, therefore, to the India House; made inquiries amongst the servants; and, after some trouble (for *that* was early in his Leadenhall Street career, and possibly he was not much known), I was shown into a small room, or else a small section of a large one (thirty-four years affect one's remembrance of some circumstances), in which was a very lofty writing-desk, separated by a still higher railing from that part of the floor on which the profane—the laity, like myself—were allowed to approach the *clerus*, or clerkly rulers of the room.<sup>1</sup> Within the railing sat, to the best of my remembrance, six quill-driving gentlemen; not gentlemen whose duty or profession it was

<sup>1</sup> See page 310.



merely to drive the quill, but who were then driving it—*gens de plume*, such *in esse*, as well as *in posse*—in act as well as habit; for, as if they supposed me a spy sent by some superior power to report upon the situation of affairs as surprised by me, they were all too profoundly immersed in their oriental studies to have any sense of my presence. Consequently, I was reduced to a necessity of announcing myself and my errand. I walked, therefore, into one of the two open doorways of the railing, and stood closely by the high stool of him who occupied the first place within the little aisle. I touched his arm, by way of recalling him from his lofty Leadenhall speculations to this sublunary world; and, presenting my letter, asked if that gentleman (pointing to the address) were really a citizen of the present room; for I had been repeatedly misled, by the directions given me, into wrong rooms. The gentleman smiled; it was a smile not to be forgotten. This was Lamb. And here occurred a *very, very* little incident—one of those which pass so fugitively that they are gone and hurrying away into Lethe almost before your attention can have arrested them; but it was an incident which to me, who happened to notice it, served to express the courtesy and delicate consideration of Lamb's manners. The seat upon which he sat was a very high one; so absurdly high, by the way, that I can imagine no possible use or sense in such an altitude, unless it were to restrain the occupant from playing truant at the fire by opposing Alpine difficulties to his descent.

“Whatever might be the original purpose of this aspiring seat, one serious dilemma arose from it, and this it was which gave the occasion to Lamb's act of courtesy. Somewhere there is an anecdote, meant to illustrate the ultra-obsequiousness of the man,—either I have heard of it in connection with some actual man known to myself, or it is told in a book of some historical coxcomb—that, being on horseback, and meeting some person or other whom it seemed advisable to flatter, he actually dismounted, in order to pay his court by a more ceremonious bow. In Russia, as we all know, this was at one time, upon meeting any of the Imperial family, an act of legal necessity; and there, accordingly, but there only, it would have worn no ludicrous aspect. Now, in this situation of Lamb's, the act of descending from his throne, a very elaborate process, with steps and stages analogous to those on horseback—of slipping your

right foot out of the stirrup, throwing your leg over the crupper, &c.—was, to all intents and purposes, the same thing as dismounting from a great elephant of a horse. Therefore it both was, and was felt to be by Lamb, supremely ludicrous. On the other hand, to have sat still and stately upon this aerial station, to have bowed condescendingly from this altitude, would have been—not ludicrous indeed; performed by a very superb person, and supported by a very superb bow, it might have been vastly fine, and even terrifying to many young gentlemen under sixteen; but it would have had an air of ungentlemanly assumption. Between these extremes, therefore, Lamb had to choose;—between appearing ridiculous himself for a moment, by going through a ridiculous evolution which no man could execute with grace; or, on the other hand, appearing lofty and assuming, in a degree which his truly humble nature (for he was the humblest of men in the pretensions which he put forward for himself) must have shrunk from with horror. Nobody who knew Lamb can doubt how the problem was solved; he began to dismount instantly; and, as it happened that the very first *round* of his descent obliged him to turn his back upon me as if for a sudden purpose of flight, he had an excuse for laughing; which he did heartily—saying, at the same time something to this effect: that I must not judge from first appearances; that he should revolve upon me; that he was not going to fly; and other facetiæ, which challenged a general laugh from the clerical brotherhood.”

An invitation to spend the evening with the Lambs followed, and De Quincey gladly went; but his account is even more laboured and not very entertaining. Lamb seems to have been mischievously disposed to wound the too tender susceptibilities of his young Oxford friend by making some very Philistine comments on the “Ancient Mariner” which De Quincey (as well as Lamb, at heart,) held sacred. “At length, when he had given utterance to some ferocious canon of judgment, which seemed to question the entire value of the poem, I said, perspiring (I dare say) in this detestable crisis—‘But, Mr. Lamb, good heavens! how is it possible you can allow yourself in such opinions? What instance could you bring from the poem that would bear you out in these insinuations?’ ‘Instances!’ said Lamb: ‘Oh, I’ll instance you, if you come to that. Instance, indeed! Pray, what do say to this—

“The many men so beautiful,  
And they all dead did lie?”

*So beautiful*, indeed! Beautiful! Just think of such a gang of Wapping vagabonds, all covered with pitch, and chewing tobacco; and the old gentleman himself—what do you call him—the bright-eyed fellow? What more might follow I never heard; for, at this point, in a perfect rapture of horror, I raised my hands—both hands—to both ears; and, without stopping to think or to apologise, I endeavoured to restore equanimity to my disturbed sensibilities by shutting out all further knowledge of Lamb's impieties. At length, he seemed to have finished; so I, on my part, thought I might venture to take off the embargo: and in fact he *had* ceased; but no sooner did he find me restored to my hearing than he said with a most sarcastic smile—which he could assume upon occasion—‘If you please, sir, we'll say grace before we begin.’ I know not whether Lamb were really piqued or not at the mode by which I had expressed my disturbance: Miss Lamb certainly was not; her goodness led her to pardon me, and to treat me—in whatever light she might really view my almost involuntary rudeness—as the party who had suffered wrong; and, for the rest of the evening, she was so pointedly kind and conciliatory in her manner that I felt greatly ashamed of my boyish failure in self-command.”

We shall meet with De Quincey again from time to time. As I have said, he always wrote heartily and in the highest terms of Lamb, but I doubt if Lamb cared much for him. The intimacy was never ripe.

George Dawe, R.A., whom Lamb in 1831 memorialised with a frankness that might too easily be mistaken for malice, was another acquaintance in these days. Lamb met him, I think, at the rooms of Henry Rogers, the banker-poet's youngest brother, where he met also Daniels, Westall and Stothard. Dawe, as we know, he used to visit in his studio, but I defer the account of him until the next chapter.



## CHAPTER XXII

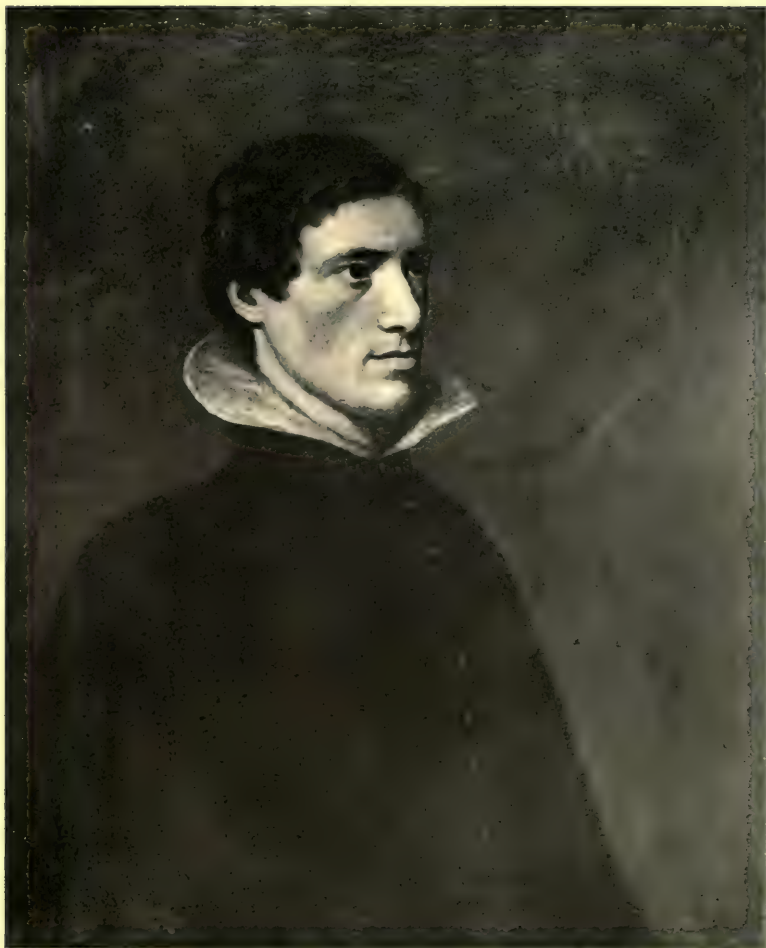
## THE KING AND QUEEN OF HEARTS

1805

The Death of John Wordsworth—Mary Lamb's Illness—Lamb's Praise of His Sister—Bridget Elia—First Praises of Pig—The "Farewell to Tobacco"—Correspondence with Hazlitt—George Dawe in His Studio.

THE year 1805 is chiefly remarkable for containing what was, so far as we know, Lamb's first literary work for children—the tiny book of rhymes and pictures known as *The King and Queen of Hearts*. In this year the Godwins, casting about for a means of adding to their income, decided to set up a juvenile publishing business, which should issue Godwin's own books for children (written under the name of Edward Baldwin) and such others as could be obtained. In order that no stigma of freethought might rest upon the firm, to its discredit in the eyes of parents and purchasers, the name of Godwin was at the first suppressed and a manager was found to act as a figure-head. This manager was one Thomas Hodgkins, who at midsummer 1805 was established in a little house in Hanway Street, off Oxford Street. I imagine that one of Godwin's first acts after the publishing business was decided upon was to invite the Lambs to write for the new firm; and Lamb's verses to accompany William Mulready's very crude drawings to the old story of the King and Queen of Hearts must have been among the earliest works that were arranged.

*The King and Queen of Hearts* was the first of a series known as the Copperplate Series—one shilling plain and eighteen-pence coloured. The first copy that came to light in 1901, when Lamb's participation in it was proved, was dated 1809, and it produced £226 at public auction; the second, dated 1806, was run up to £240. The verses are merry but



CHARLES LAMB (IN HIS THIRTIETH YEAR) IN THE DRESS OF A  
VENETIAN SENATOR

FROM THE PAINTING BY WILLIAM HAZLETT





very slight, and, except as constituting Lamb's earliest known attempt to write for children, are negligible. In 1806 we shall come to a more serious effort in juvenile literature, also written for the Godwins, a production on which some of Charles Lamb's and most of Mary Lamb's fame securely rests.

The early months of 1805 were saddened to the Lambs, as to several of their friends, by the tragic death of Captain Wordsworth, the poet's brother, who was drowned in the sinking of his ship, the East Indiaman *Earl of Abergavenny*, off Portland Bill on February 5th. Two hundred persons also lost their lives by this calamity. John Wordsworth, whose character to some extent inspired his brother's poem "The Happy Warrior," was only thirty-three. Lamb, from his position in the East India House, was able to give Wordsworth information about his brother's last moments; which he did in a series of letters now preserved in the Wordsworth family. In his first letter, after repeating the testimony of certain survivors to the captain's courageous sense of duty, he says, "We have done nothing but think of you, particularly of Dorothy. Mary is crying by me while I with difficulty write this: but as long as we remember any thing, we shall remember your Brother's noble person, and his sensible manly modest voice, and how safe and comfortable we all were together in our apartment, where I am now writing." In a letter recently made public from Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson the gratitude of herself and her brother to their friends in the Temple is very feelingly expressed.

From Mary Lamb's long letter to Dorothy Wordsworth on May 7th, 1805, I may quote a touching and beautifully simple passage: "That you would see every object with, and through your lost brother, and that that would at last become a real and everlasting source of comfort to you, I felt, and well knew from my own experience in sorrow, but till you yourself began to feel this I did not dare tell you so, but I send you some poor lines which I wrote under this conviction of mind, and before I heard Coleridge was returning home. I will transcribe them now before I finish my letter, lest a false shame prevent me then, for I know they are much worse than they ought to be, written as they were with strong feeling and on such a subject. Every line seems to me to be borrowed, but I had no better

way of expressing my thoughts, and I never have the power of altering or amending anything I have once laid aside with dissatisfaction.

Why is he wandering on the sea?  
 Coleridge should now with Wordsworth be,  
 By slow degrees he'd steal away  
 Their woe, and gently bring a ray  
 (So happily he'd time relief)  
 Of comfort from their very grief.  
 He'd tell them that their brother dead,  
 When years have passed o'er their head,  
 Will be remember'd with such holy,  
 True, and perfect melancholy,  
 That ever this lost brother John  
 Will be their heart's companion.  
 His voice they'll always hear, his face they'll always see,  
 There's nought in life so sweet as such a memory."

Very soon afterwards Mary Lamb was taken ill; and though Lamb attributes the cause largely to late hours, we may assume, knowing how tender were her sensibilities and how quick her sympathy with others, that the Wordsworths' trouble was not unrelated to this attack. In telling Dorothy Wordsworth the news Charles Lamb says (June 14th, 1805): "I have every reason to suppose that this illness, like all her former ones, will be but temporary; but I cannot always feel so. Meantime she is dead to me, and I miss a prop. All my strength is gone, and I am like a fool, bereft of her co-operation. I dare not think, lest I should think wrong; so used am I to look up to her in the least and the biggest perplexity. To say *all that* I know of her would be more than I think any body could believe or ever understand; and when I hope to have her well again with me it would be sinning against her feelings to go about to praise her: for I can conceal nothing that I do from her. She is older, and wiser, and better, than me, and all my wretched imperfections I cover to myself by resolutely thinking on her goodness. She would share life and death, heaven and hell, with me. She lives but for me. And I know I have been wasting and teasing her life for five years past incessantly with my cursed drinking and ways of going on. But even in this up-braiding of myself I am offending against her, for I know that she has cleaved to me for better, for worse;

and if the balance has been against her hitherto, it was a noble trade."

This is one of the first of Lamb's many beautiful passages of praise of his sister; and though the character sketch of Bridget Elia in the *Elia* essay "Mackery End" belongs to a later date, I am led to quote it here, beside the testimony of this letter, in order that at this stage a fuller sense of Mary Lamb's very interesting personality may be ours. In 1805, I should add, Mary Lamb was in her forty-first year, by which time she would probably have perfected most of her idiosyncracies. "Bridget Elia," wrote Lamb of his sister, in 1821, "has been my house-keeper for many a long year. I have obligations to Bridget, extending beyond the period of memory. We house together, old bachelor and maid, in a sort of double singleness; with such tolerable comfort, upon the whole, that I, for one, find in myself no sort of disposition to go out upon the mountains, with the rash king's offspring, to bewail my celibacy. We agree pretty well in our tastes and habits—yet so, as 'with a difference'. We are generally in harmony, with occasional bickerings—as it should be among near relations. Our sympathies are rather understood, than expressed; and once, upon my dissembling a tone in my voice more kind than ordinary, my cousin burst into tears, and complained that I was altered. We are both great readers in different directions. While I am hanging over (for the thousandth time) some passage in old Burton, or one of his strange contemporaries, she is abstracted in some modern tale, or adventure, whereof our common reading-table is daily fed with assiduously fresh supplies. . . .

"My cousin has a native disrelish of any thing that sounds odd or bizarre. Nothing goes down with her, that is quaint, irregular, or out of the road of common sympathy. She 'holds Nature more clever.' I can pardon her blindness to the beautiful obliquities of the *Religio Medici*; but she must apologise to me for certain disrespectful insinuations, which she has been pleased to throw out latterly, touching the intellectuals of a dear favourite of mine, of the last century but one—the thrice noble, chaste, and virtuous,—but again somewhat fantastical, and original-brain'd, generous Margaret Newcastle.

"It has been the lot of my cousin, oftener perhaps than I could have wished, to have had for her associates and mine, free-thinkers



—leaders, and disciples, of novel philosophies and systems ; but she neither wrangles with, nor accepts, their opinions. That which was good and venerable to her, when a child, retains its authority over her mind still. She never juggles or plays tricks with her understanding.

“ We are both of us inclined to be a little too positive ; and I have observed the result of our disputes to be almost uniformly this—that in matters of fact, dates, and circumstances, it turns out, that I was in the right, and my cousin in the wrong. But where we have differed upon moral points ; upon something proper to be done, or let alone ; whatever heat of opposition, or steadiness of conviction, I set out with, I am sure always, in the long run, to be brought over to her way of thinking.

“ I must touch upon the foibles of my kinswoman with a gentle hand, for Bridget does not like to be told of her faults. She hath an awkward trick (to say no worse of it) of reading in company : at which times she will answer *yes* or *no* to a question, without fully understanding its purport—which is provoking, and derogatory in the highest degree to the dignity of the putter of the said question. Her presence of mind is equal to the most pressing trials of life, but will sometimes desert her upon trifling occasions. When the purpose requires it, and is a thing of moment, she can speak to it greatly ; but in matters which are not stuff of the conscience, she hath been known sometimes to let slip a word less seasonably.”

Mary Lamb's 1805 illness was a long one, for when writing to Manning on July 27th Lamb was still waiting for her return. Probably she came home early in August. There was no long holiday this year ; only two short excursions, to Egham and to a “ place near Harrow.”

I must go back a few months at this point to interpolate a few sentences from the letter to Manning in February, in which Lamb utters his first praise of Pig—in the shape of a brawn which Manning had sent from Cambridge : “ 'Tis of all my hobbies the supreme in the eating way. He might have sent sops from the pan, skimmings, crumplets, chips, hog's lard, the tender brown judiciously scalped from a fillet of veal (dexterously replaced by a salamander), the tops of asparagus, fugitive livers, runaway gizzards of fowls, the eyes of martyred pigs, tender effusions of laxative woodcocks, the red spawn of lobsters, leverets' ears, and

such pretty filchings common to cooks; but these had been ordinary presents, the everyday courtesies of dishwashers to their sweethearts. Brawn was a noble thought. It is not every common gullet-fancier that can properly esteem it. It is like a picture of one of the choice old Italian masters. Its gusto is of that hidden sort. As Wordsworth sings of a modest poet,—‘you must love him, ere to you he will seem worthy of your love;’ so brawn, you must taste it, ere to you it will seem to have any taste at all. But ’tis nuts to the adept: those that will send out their tongues and feelers to find it out. It will be wooed, and not unsought be won. Now, ham-essence, lobsters, turtle, such popular minions, absolutely *court you*, lay themselves out to strike you at first smack, like one of David’s pictures (they call him *Darveed*), compared with the plain russet-coated wealth of a Titian or a Correggio, as I illustrated above. Such are the obvious glaring heathen virtues of a corporation dinner, compared with the reserved collegiate worth of brawn.”

Lamb’s letter to Wordsworth of September 28th indicates a revival of literary activity. He encloses the “Farewell to Tobacco” and mentions the project of farce-writing. “I have done nothing since the beginning of last year, when I lost my newspaper job, and having had a long idleness, I must do something, or we shall get very poor!” (Lamb’s salary in 1805 was £120, to which was added the usual India House gratuity, amounting then to about £50, a sum of £10 for holidays, and a little extra-work money as well, bringing the total to about £200.)

He remarks of the “Farewell to Tobacco”: “Now you have got it, you have got all my store [of poetry] for I have absolutely not another line. No more has Mary. We have nobody about us that cares for Poetry, and who will rear grapes when he shall be the sole eater? Perhaps if you encourage us to shew you what we may write, we may do something now and then before we absolutely forget the quantity of an English line for want of practice. The ‘Tobacco,’ being a little in the way of Wither (whom Southey so much likes) perhaps you will somehow convey it to him with my kind remembrances. Then, everybody will have seen it that I wish to see it: I have sent it to Malta.”

Lamb also says, in the same letter, “We have neither of us been very well for some weeks past. I am very nervous, and she

most so at those times when I am: so that a merry friend, adverting to the noble consolation we were able to afford each other, denominated us not unaptly Gum Boil and Tooth Ache: for they use to say that a Gum Boil is a great relief to a Tooth Ache." The joke was repeated by Mary Lamb in one of her letters to Sarah Stoddart, who, it seems, having had difficulty in agreeing with her brother in Malta, had returned to England and had been entrusted by him to Mary Lamb's care in London, when she could get away from her mother at Salisbury.

In the same letter Mary Lamb remarked, "If I possibly can, I will prevail upon Charles to write to your brother by the conveyance you mention; but he is so unwell, I almost fear the fortnight will slip away before I can get him in the right vein. Indeed, it has been sad and heavy times with us lately: when I am pretty well, his low spirits throws me back again; and when he begins to get a little chearful, then I do the same kind office for him. I heartily wish for the arrival of Coleridge; a few such evenings as we have sometimes passed with him would wind us up, and set us a going again.

"Do not say any thing, when you write, of our low spirits—it will vex Charles. You would laugh, or you would cry, perhaps both, to see us sit together, looking at each other with long and rueful faces, and saying, 'how do you do?' and 'how do you do?' and then we fall a-crying, and say we will be better on the morrow."

The last important letter of 1805 is to Hazlitt, who had left London for a while and was busy upon his abridgement of Tucker's *Light of Nature* and probably also meditating his *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*. From Lamb's gossip we find that he is in the midst of reading Webster's "White Devil," in the course of his researches among the old dramas for the Dramatic Specimens, a work which we may suppose him to be fitfully considering, although it was not published until 1808. He speaks also of Rickman's wife, Rickman having married Susannah Postlethwaite, of Harting, in Sussex, on October 30th; of Nelson's death—"I have followed him in fancy ever since I saw him walking in Pall Mall (I was prejudiced against him before) looking just as a Hero should look"; of a £20 lottery prize which the Lambs had drawn—"alas!! are both yours blanks?"; and of Louisa Martin—"Some things too about



MONKEY, which can't so well be written—how it set up for a fine Lady, and thought it had got Lovers, and was obliged to be convinc'd of its age from the parish register, where it was proved to be only twelve; and an edict issued that it should not give itself airs yet these four years: and how it got leave to be called Miss, by grace." This is our first glimpse of Louisa Martin, who seems to have been an especial favourite of Lamb's. Two copies of verses at least he addressed to her—"The Ape," 1806, and "To Louisa M—— whom I used to call 'Monkey'" in 1831. I have discovered nothing of the family. In a letter to Wordsworth in 1834, to which we shall come later, Lamb speaks of Louisa Martin, then a middle-aged woman, in the highest terms of esteem and friendship.

The letter also contains a reference to George Dawe, the painter, and since Lamb's acquaintanceship with this odd creature seems to have belonged mainly to this period, I may here fittingly introduce his character-sketch. Dawe, whom Lamb came to know probably through Godwin, one of his early sitters, was born in 1781, was thus by six years Lamb's junior, and was in 1805 only twenty-four. "My acquaintance with D. was in the outset of his art, when the graving tools, rather than the pencil, administered to his humble wants. Those implements, as is well known, are not the most favourable to the cultivation of that virtue, which is esteemed next to godliness. He might 'wash his hands in innocence,' and so metaphorically 'approach an altar;' but his material puds were any thing but fit to be carried to church. By an ingrained economy in soap—if it was not for pictorial effect rather—he would wash (on Sundays) the inner oval, or portrait, as it may be termed, of his countenance, leaving the unwashed temples to form a natural black frame round a picture, in which a dead white was the predominant colour. This, with the addition of green spectacles, made necessary by the impairment, which his graving labours by day and night (for he was ordinarily at them for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four) had brought upon his visual faculties, gave him a singular appearance, when he took the air abroad; in so much, that I have seen a crowd of young men and boys following him along Oxford-street with admiration, not without shouts; even as the Youth of Rome, we read in Vasari, followed the steps of Raphael with acclamations for his genius, and for his beauty,

when he proceeded from his work-shop to chat with Cardinals and Popes at the Vatican. . . .

“So entirely devoid of imagination, or any feeling for his high art, was this *Painter*, that for the few historical pictures he attempted, any sitter might sit for any character. He took once for a subject *The Infant Hercules*. Did he chuse for a model some robust antique? No. He did not even pilfer from Sir Joshua, who was nearer to his own size. But from a *show* he hired to sit to him a child in years indeed, (though no Infant,) but in fact a precocious *Man*, or human portent, that was disgustingly exhibiting at that period; a thing to be strangled. From this he formed *his* Infant Hercules. In a scriptural flight he next attempted a Sampson in the lap of Dalilah. A Dalilah of some sort was procureable for love or money, but who should stand for the Jewish Hercules? He hired a tolerably stout porter, with a thickish head of hair, curling in yellowish locks, but lithe—much like a wig. And these were the robust strengths of Sampson.

“I once was witness to a *family scene* in his painting closet, which I had entered rather abruptly, and but for his encouragement, should as hastily have retreated. He stood with displeased looks eyeing a female relative—whom I had known under happier auspices—that was kneeling at his feet with a baby in her arms, with her eyes uplifted and suppliant. Though I could have previously sworn to the virtue of Miss —, yet casual slips have been known. There are such things as families disgraced, where least you would have expected it. The child *might* be —; I had heard of no wedding—I was the last person to pry into family secrets—when D. relieved my uneasy cogitations by explaining, that the innocent, good-humoured creature before me (such as she ever was, and is now that she is married) with a baby borrowed from the public house, was acting Andromache to *his* Ulysses, for the purpose of transferring upon canvas a tender situation from the Troades of Seneca.”

As adventures are to the adventurous, so were the George Dawes and George Dyers to Charles Lamb.

## CHAPTER XXIII

1806

Fenwick and Fell Again—Lamb at a Critical Age—Picture Galleries—"Pink" De Quincey and the Lambs—Manning Leaves for China—The *Tales from Shakespear* Begun—"Mr. H." Accepted—Basil Montagu—Hazlitt, Misogynist—Coleridge in Malta and Italy—"Mr. H." Played—and Damned—Hogsflesh in Real Life—Robert William Elliston—Enter Henry Crabb Robinson—Lamb and Coleridge at the Colliers'.

**A**N unusual degree of literary activity marks the year 1806, in which the farce of which Lamb had been thinking for some time was not only written but performed, and the *Tales from Shakespear* were written.

In the earliest letter of the year—to Hazlitt, on January 15th—Lamb says that Miss Stoddart is with them on a three weeks' visit: probably thus first bringing to Hazlitt's notice the name of the lady who was to become his wife. Lamb also remarks that Fenwick is coming to town (if no kind angel intervene) to try for the rules of the Fleet Prison for debtors, while Fell is bound for Newgate, and his wife and four children to the poor-house. He adds, "Plenty of reflection and motives of gratitude to the wise disposer of all things in *us*, whose prudent conduct has hitherto ensured us a warm fire and snug roof over our heads. *Nullum numen abest si sit Prudentia*. Alas! Prudentia is in the last quarter of her tutelary shining over me. A little time and I ——— But may be I may, at last, hit upon some mode of collecting some of the vast superfluities of this money-voiding town. Much is to be got, and I don't want much. All I ask is time and leisure; and I am cruelly off for them."

Fell apparently avoided Newgate (the allusion to which may well have been a joke), for on January 25th we find Lamb asking Rickman to find him a place. He describes him as a "young man of solid but not brilliant genius . . . who would bind himself by a terrible oath never to imagine himself an



extraordinary genius again"—and with this comment Fell drops out of Lamb's life.

Writing to Hazlitt on February 19th Lamb says, "Have taken a room at 3/- a week, to be in between 5 and 8 at night, to avoid my *nocturnal*—alias *knock-eternal*—visitors." He adds that the farce "Mr. H." which was written, or finished, in this room, goes to the manager to-morrow. Where the three-shilling room was situated I do not know—perhaps in the Temple—but to Lamb's mention of it is due, I fancy, some of the misconception that has arisen with regard to his poverty. In the same letter he tells Hazlitt that having smoked ten pipes the night before, he is really giving up tobacco. But we shall meet again with this decision and good intention. Writing to Sarah Stoddart on February 20th, or thereabouts, Mary Lamb remarks humorously that that day is nothing in particular—"not a birthday . . . nor a leave-off-smoking day."

Incidentally in this letter Mary Lamb remarks, with her characteristic kindly good sense: "It is well enough, when one is talking to a friend, to edge in an odd word by way of counsel now and then; but there is something mighty irksome in its staring upon one in a letter, where one ought only to see kind words and friendly remembrances."

In her next letter we have news of her brother's restlessness at this time: "The reason why I have not had any time to spare, is because Charles has given himself some hollidays after the hard labour of finishing his farce, and, therefore, I have had none of the evening leisure I promised myself. Next week he promises to go to work again. I wish he may happen to hit upon some new plan, to his mind, for another farce: when once begun, I do not fear his perseverance, but the hollidays he has allowed himself, I fear, will unsettle him. I look forward to next week with the same kind of anxiety I did to the first entrance at the new lodging. We have had, as you know, so many teasing anxieties of late, that I have got a kind of habit of foreboding that we shall never be comfortable, and that he will never settle to work: which I know is wrong, and which I will try with all my might to overcome."

A day or so later Mary Lamb adds, in the same journal-letter: "The Lodging—that pride and pleasure of your heart and mine—is given up, *and here he is again*—Charles, I mean—as un-

settled and as undetermined as ever. When he went to the poor lodging, after the holidays I told you he had taken, he could not endure the solitariness of them, and I had no rest for the sole of my foot till I promised to believe his solemn protestations that he could and would write as well at home as there. Do you believe this?"

Then follows this interesting passage: "I have no power over Charles: he will do—what he will do. But I ought to have some little influence over myself. And therefore I am most manfully resolving to turn over a new leaf with my own mind. Your visit to us, though not a very comfortable one to yourself, has been of great use to me. I set you up in my fancy as a kind of *thing* that takes an interest in my concerns; and I hear you talking to me, and arguing the matter very learnedly, when I give way to despondency. You shall hear a good account of me, and the progress I make in altering my fretful temper to a calm and quiet one. It is but being once thorowly convinced one is wrong, to make one resolve to do so no more; and I know my dismal faces have been almost as great a drawback upon Charles's comfort, as his feverish, teasing ways have been upon mine. Our love for each other has been the torment of our lives hitherto. I am most seriously intending to bend the whole force of my mind to counteract this, and I think I see some prospect of success.

"Of Charles ever bringing any work to pass at home, I am very doubtful; and of the farce succeeding, I have little or no hope."

The truth is that Lamb was reaching a critical age. He was thirty-one, a time of life when the glittering potentialities of youth begin to assume neutral tints and a man learns what he can do and what he cannot do. The pleasant charter which is extended by society to the young, procuring them so many irresponsible hours, is now withdrawn. At thirty-one we are at the beginning of the end; suddenly we awake one morning to find that what we thought was the curtain-raiser is in reality the play itself. It is easy to understand Lamb's restlessness. Like all ambitious artists he was alternating between the certainty that he could create and the doubt whether he had not outgrown the power or had deceived himself in thinking that he ever possessed it. Add to this that his office work was heavy,

his health not robust, and his sister liable at any moment to be taken ill again. It is not surprising that he was in a nervous condition, particularly as he could not then know—as we know now—that he was one of those writers who must not force the note, who must wait until their hour strikes.

The next letter to Hazlitt—March 15th—shows Lamb for the first time in one of his fine ecstasies as a picture lover. “What do you in Shropshire when so many fine pictures are a-going, a-going every day in London? Monday I visit the Marquis of Lansdowne’s, in Berkeley Square. Catalogue 2s. 6d. Leonardos in plenty. Some other day this week I go to see Sir Wm. Young’s, in Stratford Place. Hulse’s, of Blackheath, are also to be sold this month; and in May, the first private collection in Europe, Welbore Ellis Agar’s. And there are you, perverting Nature in lying landscapes, filched from old rusty Titians, such as I can scrape up here to send you, with an additament from Shropshire Nature thrown in to make the whole look unnatural. I am afraid of your mouth watering when I tell you that Manning and I got into Angerstein’s on Wednesday. *Mon Dieu!* Such Claudes! Four Claudes bought for more than £10,000 (those who talk of Wilson being equal to Claude are either mainly ignorant or stupid); one of these was perfectly miraculous. What colours short of *bonâ fide* sunbeams it could be painted in, I am not earthly colourman enough to say; but I did not think it had been in the possibility of things. Then, a music-piece by Titian—a thousand-pound picture—five figures standing behind a piano, the sixth playing; none of the heads, as M. observed, indicating great men, or affecting it, but so sweetly disposed; all leaning separate ways, but so easy—like a flock of some divine shepherd; the colouring, like the economy of the picture, so sweet and harmonious—as good as Shakspeare’s ‘Twelfth Night,’—*almost*, that is.”<sup>1</sup>

Here and there throughout his letters and essays Lamb breaks out into noble enthusiasm for the painters he most admired; chief of whom were Leonardo and Titian. “The Raising of Lazarus” by Piombo (and perhaps Michael Angelo), which is now No. 1 in the National Gallery and was the gem of John

<sup>1</sup> The Claudes are now in the National Gallery; so also is the music piece, no longer attributed to Titian, but to his school. It is reproduced in my edition of Lamb’s Letters.



Julius Angerstein's collection in Pall Mall, was a work which moved him intensely. Lamb and his sister managed to see most of the good pictures of their day, either in sale rooms or exhibitions. De Quincey tells a good story of his sailor-brother, "Pink"—Richard De Quincey—(fresh from admiring Benjamin West's "Death and his Pale Horse") meeting with Charles and Mary Lamb in a Bond Street gallery, whose walls, in Pink's judgment, were debased by the presence of two canvases by Salvator Rosa. "There might be forty people in the room at the time my brother and I were there. We had stood for ten or fifteen minutes, examining the pictures, when at length I noticed Charles Lamb, and, at a little distance, his sister. If a creditor had wished to seize upon either, no surer place in London (no, not Drury Lane, or Covent Garden) for finding them than an exhibition from the works of the old masters. And, moreover, as, amongst certain classes of birds, if you have one, you are sure of the other, so, with respect to the Lambs (unless in those dreary seasons when the 'dual unity,' as it is most affectingly termed by Wordsworth, had been for a time sundered into a widowed desolation by the periodic affliction), seeing or hearing the brother, you knew the sister could not be far off. If she *were*, you sighed, knew what that meant, and asked no questions.

"Lamb, upon seeing us, advanced to shake hands; but he paused one moment to await the critical dogma which he perceived to be at that time issuing from Pink's lips. That it was vituperation in a high degree, anybody near us might hear; and some actually turned round in fright from catching these profane words: 'D—— the fellow! I could do better myself.' Wherewith, perhaps unconsciously, but perhaps by way of enforcing his thought, Pink (who had brought home from his long sea life a detestable practice of chewing tobacco) ejaculated a quid of some coarse quality, that lighted upon the frame of the great master's picture, and, for aught I know, may be sticking there yet. Lamb could not have approved such a judgment, nor perhaps the immeasurable presumption that might seem to have accompanied such a judgment from most men, or from an artist; but he knew that Pink was a mere sailor, knowing nothing historically of art, nor much of the pretensions of the mighty artists. Or, had it been otherwise, at all events, he

admired and loved, beyond all other qualities whatsoever, a hearty, cordial sincerity. Honest homely obstinacy, not to be enslaved by a great name—though that, again, may, by possibility, become in process of time itself an affectation—Lamb almost revered; and therefore it need not surprise anybody that, in the midst of his loud, unrepressed laughter, he came up to my brother, and offered his hand, with an air of friendliness that flattered Pink, and a little misled him; for, that evening, on dining with Pink, he said to me—‘That Lamb’s a sensible fellow. You see how evidently he approved of what I remarked about that old humbugging rascal, Salvator Rosa.’

“Lamb, in this point, had a feature of character in common with Sir Walter Scott (at least I suppose it to have been a feature of Sir Walter’s mind, upon the information of Professor Wilson): that, if a man had, or, if he supposed him to have, a strongly marked combination or tendency of feelings, of opinions, of likings, or of dislikings—what, in fact, we call a *character*—no matter whether it were built upon prejudices the most extravagant, or ignorance the most profound, provided only it were sincere, and not mere lawless audacity, but were self-consistent, and had *unity* as respected itself—in that extent he was sure to manifest liking and respect for the man. And hence it was that Lamb liked Pink much more for this Gothic and outrageous sentence upon Salvator Rosa than he would have liked him for the very best, profoundest, or most comprehensive critique upon that artist that could have been delivered. Pink, on the other hand, liked Lamb greatly, and used, in all his letters, to request that I would present his best regards to that Charles Lamb, ‘who wouldn’t be humbugged by the old rascal in Bond Street.’”

It was in the spring of this year that Lamb lost Manning in earnest. He sailed for China in April or May, not to return until 1817. Writing from his cabin on the *Thames* at Portsmouth Manning had said, “I go to China: What’s the difference to our London friends? I am persuaded I shall come back and see more of you than I have ever been able—who knows but I may make a fortune and take you and Mary out a-riding in my coach? There’s nobody has a prior claim to you, you may depend upon it—of course you know you must leave room for my

little Chinese wife, because poor Pipey's feet are so small she can't walk, you know. Does a man at my age forget and neglect his best and dearest friends? No: well then, you and Mary are safe. So God bless you both."

Lamb's reply has a wistful note. "Four years you talk of, maybe ten, and you may come back and find such alterations! Some circumstance may grow up to you or to me, that may be a bar to the return of any such intimacy. I daresay all this is Hum, and that all will come back; but indeed we die many deaths before we die, and I am almost sick when I think that such a hold as I had of you is gone. I have friends, but some of 'em are changed. Marriage, or some circumstance rises up to make them not the same. But I felt sure of you."

In the same letter he tells Manning the principal news—the *Tales from Shakespear* project. "Mary says you saw her writings about the other day, and she wishes you should know what they are. She is doing for Godwin's bookseller twenty of Shakspear's plays, to be made into Children's tales. Six are already done by her, to wit, 'The Tempest,' 'Winter's Tale,' 'Midsummer Night,' 'Much Ado,' 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' and 'Cymbeline:'. 'The Merchant of Venice' is in forwardness. I have done 'Othello' and 'Macbeth,' and mean to do all the tragedies. I think it will be popular among the little people. Besides money. It is to bring in 60 guineas. Mary has done them capitally, I think you'd think."

In Mary Lamb's next letter to Sarah Stoddart—June 2nd—she says: "William Hazlitt, the brother of him you know, is in town. . . . [Charles] likes Hazlitt better than any body, except Manning." She adds, of the *Tales*, "Charles has written Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, and has begun Hamlet; you would like to see us, as we often sit writing on one table (but not on one cushion sitting), like Hermia and Helena in the Midsummer's Night's Dream; or, rather, like an old literary Darby and Joan: I taking snuff, and he groaning all the while, and saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished, and then he finds out he has made something of it. . . ."

"Charles smokes still, and will smoke to the end of the chapter.

"Martin [Burney] has just been here. My *Tales (again)* and Charles' Farce has made the boy mad to turn Author; and he



has written a Farce, and he has made the Winter's Tale into a story; but what Charles says of himself is really true of Martin, for *he can make nothing at all of it*: and I have been talking very eloquently this morning, to convince him that nobody can write farces, &c. under thirty years of age, and so I suppose he will go home and new model his farce."

Mary Lamb also remarks, concerning marriage, apropos of Miss Stoddart's flirtation with a Mr. White, "I have known many single men I should have liked in my life (*if it had suited them*) for a husband: but very few husbands have I ever wished was mine, which is rather against the state in general; but one never is disposed to envy wives their good husbands. So much for marrying—but, however, get married, if you can."

Writing to Wordsworth on June 26th Lamb has great news—"Mr. H." has been accepted for Drury Lane. He copies the letter of acceptance and encloses a chaste design for a complimentary ticket to the Boxes on the ninth night. "I think this will be as good a pattern for Orders as I can think on. A little thin flowery border round, neat not gaudy, and the Drury Lane Apollo with the harp at the top. Or shall I have no Apollo?—simply nothing? Or perhaps the Comic Muse? The same form, only I think without the Apollo, will serve for the pit and galleries. I think it will be best to write my name at full-length; but then if I give away a great many, that will be tedious. Perhaps *Ch. Lamb* will do." The other news is that the Lambs have supped with the Clarksons and that Mrs. Godwin has been visiting Mrs. Charlotte Smith, the sonneteer.

The remark in the same letter that Montagu has lost his wife, brings another of Lamb's secondary friends before us—Basil Montagu, the lawyer, then thirty-six years of age, and the friend of Godwin, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The reference is to Montagu's second wife, whom he had married in 1801. He afterwards married the widow of Thomas Skepper, of York—the Mrs. Montagu of whose conversation Hazlitt wrote so glowingly, the friend of Carlyle and Edward Irving. In Fanny Kemble's recollections is a pleasant description of Montagu and his third wife (the mother of the famous Mrs. Procter, and grandmother of Adelaide Ann Procter), which I may quote in default of anything more vivid. "Basil Montagu was the son of the Earl of Sandwich and the beautiful Miss Wray, whose German

Mr. H.

I wrote that in more weakness  
of triumph. Have nothing more to say about it. The Managers  
I think my class have decided its worth for me. They are the best  
judges of Mr. C's, and it would be unwise in me to expect a false  
modesty after the very flattering letter which I have received of the  
ample

I think his note  
be as good a return  
for Orest as I  
can think on. It  
fills him from  
to his sound, and  
is good, and  
to my love  
of yellow with the  
beats at the top.  
Or will I have no  
apolo? - simply  
why? - or perhaps  
the same Muse?

the same form, or  
I think without the  
of them, will serve for  
the fit of galleries. I  
think it or it be best to  
write my name and find  
book. But then if I  
give away a great many  
that will be tedious.  
Perhaps Ch. Lamb will do

Boles Now I think  
on it I'll have in Capital  
Re-writing a new Note in  
hand, or rather perhaps  
Notes in old English characters  
like the one at R. C. C.

Admit  
to  
Boles  
Mr. H.  
Ninth Night  
Dissolved Lamb

REDUCED FACSIMILE OF LETTER FROM LAMB TO WILLIAM WORDSWORTH  
FROM THE ORIGINAL IN THE POSSESSION OF MR. GORDON WORDSWORTH





lover murdered her at the theatre by shooting her in her private box, and then blew his own brains out. Mr. Montagu inherited ability, eccentricity, and personal beauty, from his parents. . . . I have a general impression that his personal intercourse gave a far better idea of his intellectual ability than anything that he achieved either in his profession or in letters. . . . His conversation was extremely vivid and sparkling, and the quaint eccentricity of his manner added to the impression of originality which he produced upon one. Very unlike the common run of people as he was, however, he was far less so than his wife, who certainly was one of the most striking and remarkable persons I have known. Her appearance was extraordinary: she was much above middle height, with a beautiful figure and face, the outline of which was of classical purity and severity, while her whole carriage and appearance was dignified and majestic to the highest degree. I knew her for upwards of thirty years, and never saw her depart from a peculiar style of dress, which she had adopted with the finest instinct of what was personally becoming as well as graceful and beautiful in itself."

Lamb's letter to Wordsworth which has led to this diversion contains also this passage: "Mary is just stuck fast in All's Well that Ends Well. She complains of having to set forth so many female characters in boy's clothes. She begins to think Shakspear must have wanted Imagination. I to encourage her, for she often faints in the prosecution of her great work, flatter her with telling her how well such a play and such a play is done. But she is stuck fast and I have been obliged to promise to assist her. To do this it will be necessary to leave off Tobacco. But I had some thoughts of doing that before, for I sometimes think it does not agree with me.

"W. Hazlitt is in Town. I took him to see a very pretty girl professedly, where there were two young girls—the very head and sum of the Girlery was two young girls—they neither laughed nor sneered nor giggled nor whispered—but they were young girls—and he sat and frowned blacker and blacker, indignant that there should be such a thing as Youth and Beauty, till he tore me away before supper in perfect misery and owned he could not bear young girls. They drove him mad. So I took him home to my old Nurse [Mary Lamb], where he recover'd perfect tranquillity." The toils were, however, as we shall see,

closing about the misogynist. Every day his meeting with Sarah Stoddart drew nearer.

On July 4th Mary Lamb gives Sarah Stoddart further news of Hazlitt and Charles. "Charles and Hazlitt are going to Sadler's Wells, and I am amusing myself in their absence with reading a manuscript of Hazlitt's; but have laid it down to write a few lines, to tell you how we are going on. Charles has begged a month's hollidays, of which this is the first day, and they are all to be spent at home. We thank you for your kind invitations, and were half-inclined to come down to you; but after mature deliberation, and many wise consultations, such as you know we often hold, we came to the resolution of staying quietly at home: and during the hollidays we are both of us to set stoutly to work and finish the Tales, six of them being yet to do. We thought, if we went anywhere and left them undone, they would lay upon our minds; and that when we returned, we should feel unsettled, and our money all spent besides: and next summer we are to be very rich, and then we can afford a long journey some where.

"I shall soon have done my work, and know not what to begin next. Now, will you set your brains to work and invent a story, either for a short child's story, or a long one that would make a kind of Novel, or a Story that would make a play. Charles wants me to write a play, but I am not over anxious to set about it, but seriously will you draw me out a skeleton of a story, either from memory of any thing that you have read, or from your own invention, and I will fill it up in some way or other."

A day or so later Mary Lamb adds: "They (Hazlitt and Charles) came home from Sadler's Well so dismal and dreary dull on Friday, that I gave them both a good scolding—*quite a setting to rights*; and I think it has done some good, for Charles has been very chearful ever since. I begin to hope the *home hollidays* will go on very well."

We must now turn for a while to Coleridge, of whom there have been indistinct tidings from time to time, for he returned to England in August of this year, a broken man. He had, as we have seen, reached Malta in May, 1804, and for a while had lived in Stoddart's house. But Stoddart was a man of inflexible will and a very stern sense of moral responsibility, and Coleridge seems quickly to have found that to be comfortable he must leave. He therefore passed in June or early July to the resi-

dence of the Governor, Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander John Ball, who had been one of Nelson's captains, and there he talked well and did a little secretarial work. In August he tired of Malta and left for Sicily, nourishing a somewhat vague notion, shared by Ball, of "drawing up a political paper on the revenue and resources" of the island. In November he departed from Syracuse and returned to Malta, where he lived in a garret in the Treasury and resumed his duties with the Governor: in January, 1805, actually succeeding to the post of Public Secretary, at a salary of £1,200—an interim appointment, which lasted, however, for some eight months, although Coleridge states that the pay was not satisfactorily arranged.

The permanent Public Secretary arriving in September, Coleridge, who had been distastefully busy in his official capacity, on the 22nd said good-bye to an island which he had grown to detest, and sailed for Italy. He seems to have divided his time between Naples and Rome until May 18th, 1806, sending only very irregular and fragmentary accounts of himself to England. The French invested Naples while he was in Italy, and his reason for leaving the country in a panic, as he did, is said to have been the order for his arrest on account of certain of his old *Morning Post* articles against Napoleon. Be this as it may, he sailed from Leghorn, probably in June, and, after a bad passage in which he was very ill, reached Portsmouth on August 11th, 1806. He proceeded to London on the 17th, and on the 18th took up his abode with the Lambs in Mitre Court Buildings, weak in health and hopeless for the future.

As Mr. Dykes Campbell says, in his memoir of Coleridge, "Almost his first words to Stuart were: 'I am literally afraid, even to cowardice, to ask for any person, or of any person.' Spite of the friendliest and most unquestioning welcome from all most dear to him, it was the saddest of home-comings, for the very sympathy held out with both hands induced only a bitter, hopeless feeling of remorse—a

Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain;—  
And genius given, and knowledge won in vain;—

of broken promises,—promises to friends and promises to himself; and above all, sense of a will paralysed, dead perhaps, killed by his own hand." Coleridge remained at Lamb's at any



rate until August 29th, afterwards taking rooms in the *Courier* office at 348 Strand. Meanwhile his reluctance to meet or communicate with his wife was causing his friends much concern, and none more than Mary Lamb, who wrote to Dorothy Wordsworth at least two letters on the subject, filled with anxious sympathy, asking for the mediation of Wordsworth or Southey. The earlier letter of the two is missing.

On December 5th Lamb tells Manning of the failure of Holcroft's play "The Vindictive Man," and Holcroft adds a friendly postscript, all unconscious of the subject of Lamb's letter. Lamb also describes the plot of "Mr. H.," from which he expects £300 altogether. "However, don't let it go any further. I understand there are dramatic exhibitions in China. One would not like to be forestalled." Mary and he, Lamb says, are to sit "next the orchestra in the pit, next the tweedledees."

And so we come to the great night itself, December 10th, 1806, when "Mr. H." was produced. As the playbill tells us, Elliston was in the title-part—a great asset—and everything promised well. Lamb, his sister, Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson were together in the pit; a strong body of friendly clerks came from the East India House, and, with John Lamb at their head, from the South-Sea House. All promised well and the prologue went splendidly; but the farce would not do. It was condemned heartily, the dramatist, Robinson tells us, joining in the hisses as cordially as any—brave critic that he was. (He said afterwards that he did so because he was so damnably afraid of being taken for the author.) We laugh at the story now, and Lamb used to laugh as he told it, but it is not the least pathetic incident in the history of literature, this utter breakdown of a year's plans, and Lamb's instant recognition of the soundness of the verdict.

His letter to Wordsworth illustrates his fine temper:—

"Mary's Love to all of you—I wouldn't let her write—

"DEAR WORDSWORTH, Mr. H. came out last night and failed. I had many fears; the subject was not substantial enough. John Bull must have solider fare than a *Letter*. We are pretty stout about it, have had plenty of condoling friends, but after all, we had rather it should have succeeded. You will see the Prologue in most of the Morning Papers. It was received with such shouts as I never witness'd to a Prologue. It was at-

tempted to be encored. How hard! a thing I did merely as a task, because it was wanted—and set no great store by; and Mr. H.—!!

“The quantity of friends we had in the house, my brother and I being in Public Offices &c., was astonishing—but they yielded at length to a few hisses. A hundred hisses—damn the word, I write it like kisses—how different—a hundred hisses outweigh a 1000 Claps. The former come more directly from the Heart—Well, ’tis withdrawn and there is an end.

“Better Luck to us——

C. L.

“11 Dec.—(turn over).

“P.S. Pray when any of you write to the Clarksons, give our kind Loves, and say we shall not be able to come and see them at Xmas—as I shall have but a day or two,—and tell them we bear our mortification pretty well.”

Hazlitt has given us in his essay “On Great and Little Things” the story of the evening. “We often make life unhappy in wishing things to have turned out otherwise than they did, merely because that is possible to the imagination which is impossible in fact. I remember when L[amb]’s farce was damned (for damned it was, that’s certain) I used to dream every night for a month after (and then I vowed I would plague myself no more about it) that it was revived at one of the Minor or provincial theatres with great success, that such and such retrenchments and alterations had been made in it, and that it was thought *it might do at the other House*. I had heard indeed (this was told in confidence to L.) that *Gentleman Lewis* was present on the night of its performance, and said, that if he had had it, he would have made it, by a few judicious curtailments, ‘the most popular little thing that had been brought out for some time.’ How often did I conjure up in recollection the full diapason of applause at the end of the *Prologue*, and hear my ingenious friend in the first row of the pit roar with laughter at his own wit! Then I dwelt with forced complacency on some part in which it had been doing well: then we would consider (in concert) whether the long, tedious opera of the *Travellers*, which preceded it, had not tried people beforehand, so that they had not spirits left for the quaint and sparkling ‘wit skirmishes’ of the dialogue, and we all agreed it might have gone down after a Tragedy, except L. himself, who swore he had no

hopes of it from the beginning, and that he knew the name of the hero when it came to be discovered could not be got over."

As a matter of fact "Mr. H." was an unusually clever play of its kind, and it still reads well ; but there were reasons enough for its failure. To a public fed on the broad dramatic fun of Colman and O'Keefe there was nothing satisfying in a farce the chief humour of which turned upon a grotesque surname. The audience looked for comic situations and droll horseplay, and were offered only a literary jest. Moreover to many of them it cannot have been considered worthy even of the name of jest. No visitor to the theatre, for example, who took an interest in cricket at that day can have been in the least degree amused by the name of Hogsflesh, since the famous Hogsflesh of Hambleton, the bowler, was a household name among all who followed the game. Again, no one in the audience who had stayed at Worthing, the new fashionable watering-place, can have been amused, since Hogsflesh was the name of one of the two innkeepers there, the other being, by an odd chance, Bacon. A rhyme on these names, current at the time, seems to have anticipated Lamb's secret only too thoroughly :—

Brighton is a pretty street,  
Worthing is much taken :  
If you can't get any other meat,  
There's Hogsflesh and Bacon.

The management of Drury Lane advertised "Mr. H." as a success, and intended to repeat the performance, but Lamb begged them not. Yet across the Atlantic it was frequently well received—another instance of America's fidelity to Charles Lamb.

Writing to Mrs. Clarkson, Mary Lamb said that Charles intended to write another farce "with all his dearly bought experience in his head," but he did not do so for many years, and when he did, it was that very poor thing "The Pawnbroker's Daughter."

"Mr. H." brought Lamb at any rate one new acquaintance in whom, although they were never very intimate, he always delighted—Robert William Elliston, the actor. According to the essay "Ellistoniana" Lamb first met Elliston in his circulating library at Leamington, but that cannot have been the case. I feel certain that he first met Elliston in connection with "Mr. H."



In his superb character sketch of the actor, Lamb tells this story, which belonged, I have little doubt, to 1806 or an adjacent year. "One proud day to me he took his roast mutton with us in the Temple, to which I had superadded a preliminary haddock. After a rather plentiful partaking of the meagre banquet, not unrefreshed with the humbler sort of liquors, I made a sort of apology for the humility of the fare, observing that for my own part I never ate but one dish at dinner. 'I too never eat but one thing at dinner'—was his reply—then after a pause—'reckoning fish as nothing.' The manner was all. It was as if by one peremptory sentence he had decreed the annihilation of all the savory esculents, which the pleasant and nutritious-food-giving Ocean pours forth upon poor humans from her watery bosom. This was *greatness*, tempered with considerate *tenderness* to the feelings of his scanty but welcoming entertainer."

So—with the sense of failure, we may feel sadly sure, too present with Lamb—died the year 1806. Before leaving it, however, I should like to add that our first information of his famous Wednesday evenings (afterwards changed to Thursdays) was in a letter to Manning on December 5th. "Rickman and Captain Burney are well; they assemble at my house pretty regularly of a Wednesday—a new institution. Like other great men I have a public day, cribbage and pipes, with Phillips and noisy Martin [Burney]." For some years these Wednesday parties were held once a week, any one of Lamb's circle being at liberty to drop in for cards, conversation and cold supper. Several descriptions of the evenings have been written, but all belong rather to a later period. I defer them therefore for ten years or so, until Talfourd and Procter have joined the circle.

An event of great importance in Lamb's life—or at least in our knowledge of Lamb's life—which occurred in 1806 has been the first meeting with Henry Crabb Robinson. "I was introduced to the Lambs," he writes, "by Mrs. Clarkson, and I heard of them also from W. Hazlitt. . . . They were then living in a garret in Inner Temple Lane." (Robinson, who wrote this in extreme old age, was wrong; the Lambs were living in a set of upper rooms in Mitre Court Buildings.) "In that humble apartment I spent many happy hours, and saw a greater number of excellent persons than I had ever seen collected together in one room."

It is rather odd that Robinson, who had been well known to George Dyer and Hazlitt since 1799, had not before met the Lambs. In 1806 he was thirty-one, almost exactly a month younger than Lamb. Not yet having made up his mind to go to the Bar, he had settled, after serving his time with a solicitor, in Germany, met Goethe and Schiller, studied at Jena, and translated German works into English. In 1807 he joined the *Times* staff as special correspondent at Altona; later he was sent to Corunna, and subsequently took up his post as foreign editor of the paper. In 1809 he abandoned journalism, devoted himself to law, and in 1813 was called to the Bar and joined the Norfolk Circuit. We shall see much of him later.

Robinson brought several friends into the Lamb circle, among them John Dyer Collier and Mrs. Collier, and their son, John Payne Collier, afterwards notorious as a Shakespearian emendator. Young Collier, who was in those days a journalist, had already begun to take a profound interest in Early English and Elizabethan literature. In his *Old Man's Diary*, which was privately printed in 1871, are many glimpses of Lamb. One passage, written in 1833, may be quoted here, since it applies more or less to the period that we have reached. "Although it is now almost twenty years since, I distinctly recollect the first time I saw Coleridge and Lamb together: they came to my father's; he then living in Hatton Garden, but was not at home: H. C. R. was there to receive them; and the conversation turning upon the fineness of the day, my mother said that the sun had almost put out her eyes. 'Yes,' said Coleridge, quoting a line from 'Love's Labour's Lost,'

'Light seeking light doth light of light beguile.'

I did not then know from whence the line came, but I knew it was verse, not only from the measure, but from the peculiar, rather sing-song way in which Coleridge pronounced the passage. Lamb made another quotation from the very same play on the same day; for my mother was employed upon painting a rose, and Lamb, observing it, said,

'At Christmas I no more desire a rose,  
Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled shows.'

But how he applied it I do not remember, because it was now midsummer, not winter. They both made themselves very agreeable, and even my young mind was struck by the pleasant way in which they treated the familiar topics of conversation; while Coleridge, as I thought, especially endeavoured to adapt his remarks to the younger children."



## CHAPTER XXIV

1807 AND 1808

*Tales from Shakespear* Published—A Visit to the Clarksons—Hazlitt's Misogyny Overcome—The Hazlitt Suicide Joke—Plans for Hazlitt's Wedding—Braham's Singing—Mary Matilda Betham—Lamb's "Company Ways"—Coleridge's Lectures—Hazlitt's Wedding—*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived about the Time of Shakespear*—Mrs. Leicester's School—Collaboration with the Sheridans—Promise of the *Friend*.

THE *Tales from Shakespear* "by Charles Lamb" were published in January, 1807, with twenty plates by Mulready, chosen, much to Lamb's annoyance, by Mrs. Godwin. In sending the two little volumes to Wordsworth on January 29th, he says that he is responsible for "Lear, Macbeth, Timon, Romeo, Hamlet, Othello, and for occasionally a tail piece or correction of grammar, for none of the cuts and all of the spelling;" also for half of the preface, the first part of which was written by Mary Lamb. It seems to have been Godwin's fault that Lamb's name stood alone on the title-page. I imagine that both the authors wished for anonymity, and that Mary Lamb insisted upon it, having probably a very natural disinclination to appear in public. I do not find her publicly associated with the book until the issue of a directory of authors a dozen years later.

The preface to the *Tales from Shakespear* ends thus: "What these Tales have been to you in childhood, that and much more it is my wish that the true Plays of Shakespear may prove to you in older years—enrichers of the fancy, strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thoughts, a lesson of all sweet and honourable thoughts and actions, to teach you courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity; for of examples, teaching these virtues, his pages are full." To a large extent Lamb's wish must have been fulfilled, since the book still holds its own as a nursery classic, and will, I think, continue to do so for many years. Closer paraphrases of the plays

have been published, but the delicate reasonableness and charm of the Lambs' version has never been approached. Both brother and sister had a congenial task in emphasising the gentleness of Shakespeare's heroines and the nobility of his heroes—no one could have done it so sweetly as they, or so much in the spirit of the great original. The narratives are very dexterous. The pleasanter and more ordinarily human plays were safe with Mary Lamb, whose avoidance of adult complexities amounts to genius. Of the tragedies, which fell to Lamb, who retold them in easy prose of a slightly austere cast, "Timon" is perhaps the most dignified and remarkable.

Our information of what otherwise happened in 1807 is meagre, but I imagine that Lamb set to work upon his prose story of the *Adventures of Ulysses*, which he prepared from George Chapman's translation of the *Odyssey*, shortly or immediately after the completion of the *Tales from Shakespear*, and that Mary Lamb was thinking both of *Mrs. Leicester's School* and of *Poetry for Children*, which were, however, as we shall see, not published until 1808 and 1809.

The year 1807 is one of the barrenest in the matter of letters. But fortunately a note to the Clarksons has recently been published which tells us that the Lambs visited the philanthropist and his wife at Bury St. Edmunds in June; that Mary Lamb, after a very happy time, was taken ill and had quickly to be removed to Hoxton; and that Lamb spent the rest of his holiday in working at his *Dramatic Specimens* in the Museum—a piece of information which helps to emphasise the literary activity of this year.

The next letter of 1807 is from Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart, written, I imagine, about October. Since the preceding letter of their correspondence William Hazlitt had met Miss Stoddart, had proposed, and was about to be accepted. The letter, which is full of amused interest in this development, ends, "If I were sure you would not be quite starved to death, nor beaten to a mummy, I should like to see Hazlitt and you come together, if (as Charles observes) it were only for the joke sake." The other news is that Lamb is writing the prologue for Godwin's new tragedy "Faulkener," which was produced with moderate success on December 16th, 1807.

On December 21st Mary Lamb writes again, urging upon

Sarah Stoddart the importance of getting the approval of her brother, who was in England again for a while, upon her marriage. Stoddart, when told, was not enthusiastic; and indeed from that time forward he and Hazlitt mutually fostered a disagreement which under political stress ripened into acute hostility in later years.

In the same month—December—began the great Hazlitt suicide joke, which Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, the essayist's grandson, lately put on record in his volume *Lamb and Hazlitt*. As a humorous means—or so I imagine—of bringing home to his friends the defeat and surrender of the determined bachelor, Lamb wrote a letter on December 29th to Joseph Hume, an acquaintance at Somerset House, announcing that Hazlitt had cut his throat (i.e., had become engaged). “I suppose you know what has happen'd to our poor friend Hazlitt. If not, take it as I read it in the *Morning Post* or *Fashionable World* of this morning: ‘Last night Mr. H., a portrait painter in Southampton Buildings, Holborn, put an end to his existence by cutting his throat in a shocking manner. It is supposed that he must have committed his purpose with a pallet-knife, as the edges of the cicatrice or wound were found besmeared with a yellow consistence, but the knife could not be found. The reasons of this rash act are not assigned; an unfortunate passion has been mentioned; but nothing certain is known. The deceased was subject to hypochondria, low spirits, but he had lately seemed better, having paid more than usual attention to his dress and person. Besides being a painter, he had written some pretty things in prose & verse.’”

Hazlitt played up gallantly enough. On January 10th, 1808, he issued a manifesto of his vitality, and an appeal that his funeral might not take place as was intended. At the end he enumerated his most valuable belongings, concluding thus: “7, & lastly, a small Claude Lorraine mirror, which Mr. Lamb the other evening secretly purloined after a pretended visit of condolence to his sick friend; & which will doubtless be found shamelessly hung up in the chambers of the fraudulent possessor as a final trophy & insult over the memory of the deceased. It is probable that when charged with this irregular transfer of property he will say that it was won at a game at cribbage. But this is an entirely false pretence.



“With all the sincerity of a man doubtful between life & death, the petitioner declares that he looks upon the said Charles Lamb as the ring-leader in this unjust conspiracy against him, & as the sole cause & author of the jeopardy he is in: but that as losers have leave to speak, he must say, that, if it were not for a poem he wrote on Tobacco about two years ago, a farce called *Mr. H*—— he brought out last winter with more wit than discretion in it, some prologues & epilogues he has since written with good success, & some lively notes he is at present writing on dead authors [the *Dramatic Specimens*], he sees no reason why he should not be considered as much a dead man as himself, & the undertaker spoken to accordingly.”

Lamb and Hume kept the ball in the air for a few days longer. The joke then died.

Leigh Hunt, in an essay on *Æronautics* in the *New Monthly Magazine*, has an odd story of Lamb in high spirits in Hazlitt's company, which may be told here: “The late admirable writer and most kind human being, Charles Lamb, one of the most considerate of kinsmen, and highly imaginative also in his way, could run (as he once actually did) along the top of a high parapet wall in the Temple,—so much to the terror of Hazlitt, that the latter cried out, in a sort of rage and cruel transport of sympathy, ‘Lamb, if you don't come down, I shall push you over.’”

On February 12th, 1808, Mary Lamb's practical mind is busy with Sarah Stoddart's wedding. “I find Hazlitt has mentioned to you an intention which we had of asking you up to town, which we were bent on doing, but, having named it since to your brother, the Doctor expressed a strong desire that you should not come to town to be at any other house than his own, for he said that it would have a very strange appearance. His wife's father is coming to be with them till near the end of April, after which time he shall have full room for you. And if you are to be married, he wishes that you should be married with all the proper decorums, *from his house*. Now though we should be most willing to run any hazards of disobliging him, if there were no other means of your and Hazlitt's meeting, yet as he seems so friendly to the match, it would not be worth while to alienate him from you and ourselves too, for the slight accommodation which the difference of a few weeks would make, provided

always, and be it understood, that if you and H. make up your minds to be married before the time in which you can be at your brother's, our house stands open and most ready at a moment's notice to receive you. Only we would not quarrel unnecessarily with your brother. Let there be a clear necessity shewn, and we will quarrel with any body's brother."

Writing to Manning on February 26th Lamb tells all the news. "A treaty of marriage is on foot between William Hazlitt and Miss Stoddart. Something about settlements only retards it. She has somewhere about £80 a year, to be £120 when her mother dies. He has no settlement except what he can claim from the Parish. *Pauper est Cinna, sed amat.* The thing is therefore in abeyance. But there is love o' both sides. . . .

"I have done two books since the failure of my farce; they will both be out this Summer. The one is a juvenile book—'The Adventures of Ulysses,' intended to be an introduction to the reading of Telemachus! It is done out of the Odyssey, not from the Greek: I would not mislead you; nor yet from Pope's Odyssey, but from an older translation of one Chapman. The 'Shakspear Tales' suggested the doing it. Godwin is in both those cases my bookseller. The other is done for Longman, and is 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets contemporary with Shakspear.' Specimens are becoming fashionable. We have—'Specimens of Ancient English Poets,' 'Specimens of Modern English Poets,' 'Specimens of Ancient English Prose Writers,' without end. They used to be called 'Beauties.' You have seen 'Beauties of Shakspear?' so have many people that never saw any beauties in Shakspear. Longman is to print it, and be at all the expense and risk; and I am to share the profits after all deductions; i.e. a year or two hence I must pocket what they please to tell me is due to me. But the book is such as I am glad there should be. It is done out of old plays at the Museum and out of Dodsley's collection, &c. It is to have notes.

"Do you like Braham's singing?" the letter continues. "The little Jew has bewitched me. I follow him like as the boys follow Tom the Piper. He cured me of melancholy, as David cured Saul; but I don't throw stones at him, as Saul did at David in payment. I was insensible to music till he gave me a new sense. O, that you could go to the new opera of 'Kais'

to-night! 'Tis all about Eastern manners; it would just suit you. It describes the wild Arabs, wandering Egyptians, lying dervishes, and all that sort of people, to a hair. You needn't ha' gone so far to see what you see, if you saw it as I do every night at Drury-lane Theatre. Braham's singing, when it is impassioned, is finer than Mrs. Siddons's or Mr. Kemble's acting; and when it is not impassioned, it is as good as hearing a person of fine sense talking. The brave little Jew! . . .

"Wordsworth, the great poet, is coming to town; he is to have apartments in the Mansion House. He says he does not see much difficulty in writing like Shakspeare, if he had a mind to try it. It is clear then nothing is wanting but the mind. Even Coleridge a little checked at this hardihood of assertion."<sup>1</sup>

Later in the letter Lamb says, "Dyer came to me the other evening at 11 o'clock, when there was a large room full of company, which I usually get together on a Wednesday evening (all great men have public days), to propose to me to have my face done by a Miss Beetham (or Betham), a miniature painter, . . . to put before my book of Extracts. I declined it."

Miss Betham was Matilda Betham, who came to know the Lambs with some intimacy. Among her portraits are miniatures of Mrs. Coleridge, Sara Coleridge, and George Dyer, who addressed to her a complimentary copy of verses. Among the recollections of Lamb which Miss Betham sent to Talfourd, and which he used only in the first edition of the *Final Memorials*, are some trifling yet not unamusing anecdotes of Lamb's "company" ways. Thus: "When I knew him first, I happened to sit next him at dinner, and he was running on about some lady who had died of love for him, saying 'he was very sorry,' but we could not command such inclinations, making all the common-place stuff said on such occasions appear very ridiculous; his sister laughingly interrupting him now and then, by saying, 'Why she's alive now!' 'Why she's married, and has a large family,' &c."

Again, "A Miss Pate (when he heard of her, he asked if she

<sup>1</sup>This agreeable passage was omitted by Talfourd in his transcript of the letter, Wordsworth being then living. Crabb Robinson quotes the remark in his *Diary*, but his editor, Dr. Sadler, was also unnecessarily kind, and for the poet's name substituted a dash.



was any relation to Mr. John *Head*, of Ipswich) was at a party, and he said on hearing her name, 'Miss Pate I hate.' 'You are the first person who ever told me so, however,' said she. 'Oh! I mean nothing by it. If it had been Miss Dove, I should have said "Miss Dove I love," or "Miss Pike I like."' . . . Another who was very much marked with the small-pox, he said, looked as if the devil had ridden rough-shod over her face. I saw him talking to her afterwards with great apparent interest, and noticed it, saying, 'I thought he had not liked her.' His reply was, 'I like her internals very well.' I might remark here that Matilda Betham, who lived to a great age, treasured more than all others among her books those given her by Lamb, with the inscription "Matilda Betham, with Charles Lamb's old Love."

It is now time again to take up the threads of Coleridge's life. We saw him last in London after returning from Italy, in 1806. During 1807 he was largely in the west of England, sometimes with Poole, sometimes with his wife, from whom he had not yet separated, planning a series of lectures to be given at the Royal Institution and postponing the execution of this and other tasks. In November he had received De Quincey's gift of £300, and at the end of 1807 he was at the *Courier* office again, really at work upon the lectures, the subject of which was poetry. These were given fitfully between February and June, 1808, the series being much interrupted by Coleridge's bad health, which in March was so unsatisfactory as to cause Wordsworth to come to town largely in order to see him. Southey also made the journey. During their visit Coleridge became stronger, and, the lectures off his mind at last, visited the Clarksons at Bury St. Edmunds. Later he moved to Grasmere, where he made his home, recovered his spirits to some extent, planned the *Friend*, and finally separated from his wife, although remaining on fairly good terms with her.

Writing to Mrs. Clarkson at the end of the year, 1808, Mary Lamb says—not I think without real grief, for her feeling for Coleridge, I always fancy, was a very tender and half-maternal one:—"Coleridge in a manner gave us up when he was in town, and we have now lost all traces of him. At the time he was in town I received two letters from Miss Wordsworth which I never answered because I would not complain to her of our old friend. As this has never been explained to her it must seem very strange,

more particularly so, as Miss Hutchinson & Mrs. Wordsworth were in an ill state of health at the time. Will you some day soon write a few words just to tell me how they all are and all you know concerning them? Do not imagine that I am now *complaining* to you of Coleridge. Perhaps we are both in fault, we expect *too much*, and he gives *too little*. We ought many years ago to have understood each other better. Nor is it quite all over with us yet, for he will some day or other come in with the same old face, and receive (after a few spiteful words from me) the same warm welcome as ever. But we could not submit to sit as hearers at his lectures and not be permitted to see our old friend when *school-hours* were over."

To return, on March 15th Lamb had Crabb Robinson to breakfast, to meet Wordsworth. It was Robinson's introduction to a poet whom he admired profoundly and whom he afterwards knew intimately. At the same time Mary Lamb is writing to Miss Stoddart about the wedding, which draws very near—would her friend like her as bridesmaid to wear the "dead-whitish-bloom" coloured silk which Manning has sent from China, or the sprigged gown, and so forth. "I shall have no present to give you on your marriage, nor do I expect that I shall be rich enough to give anything to baby at the first christening, but at the second, or third child's I hope to have a coral or so to spare out of my own earnings. Do not ask me to be God-mother, for I have an objection to that—but there is I believe, no serious duties attached to a bride's maid, therefore I come with a willing mind, bringing nothing with me but many wishes, and not a few hopes, and a very little of fears of happy years to come."

On Sunday morning, May 1st, 1808, at St. Andrew's Church, Holborn, William Hazlitt and Sarah Stoddart were made man and wife. Mary Lamb was the only bridesmaid, and Charles Lamb, John Stoddart and Mrs. Stoddart the only other guests of whom we have any record. Lamb told Southey some years later that he was like to have been turned out several times during the ceremony—"anything awful makes me laugh."

Some time in the summer Longmans published the *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare*, on which Lamb had been working desultorily for some years and which he may be said to have been unconsciously

preparing to write all his life. A letter from Southey to Mrs. Southey in May, 1804, suggests that Southey may have been the begetter of the book: "I saw Longman yesterday. . . . I am trying to make him publish a collection of the scarce old English poets, which will be the fittest thing in the world for Lamb to manage, if he likes it; or perhaps to manage with my co-operation." Lamb, when approached, may have considered the scheme and have modified it into the *Specimens*.

The work laid the foundation of his reputation as a critic. Until its appearance he had been known, if at all, only as an experimentalist in verse, prose, and the drama. But to the discerning eye there was nothing tentative about the notes and selections in this new volume; they were the work of an imaginative critic of a very high order, who knew his own mind. We can believe that even Lamb's friends must have been not a little surprised by the courage and vigour of some of his judgments. Thus, of Marlowe:—

Marlowe's Jew does not approach so near to Shakspeare's, as his Edward II. does to Richard II. Shylock, in the midst of his savage purpose, is a man. His motives, feelings, resentments, have something human in them. "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" Barabas is a mere monster, brought in with a large painted nose, to please the rabble. He kills in sport, poisons whole nunneries, invents infernal machines. He is just such an exhibition as a century or two earlier might have been played before the Londoners, by the *Royal Command*, when a general pillage and massacre of the Hebrews had been previously resolved on in the cabinet. It is curious to see a superstition wearing out. The idea of a Jew (which our pious ancestors contemplated with such horror) has nothing in it now revolting. We have tamed the claws of the beast, and pared its nails, and now we take it to our arms, fondle it, write plays to flatter it: it is visited by princes, affects a taste, patronises the arts, and is the only liberal and gentlemanlike thing in Christendom.

And again, also of Marlowe:—

Barabas the Jew, and Faustus the Conjuror, are offsprings of a mind which at least delighted to dally with interdicted subjects. They both talk a language which a believer would have been tender of putting into the mouth of a character though but in fiction. But the holiest minds have sometimes not thought it blameable to counterfeit impiety in the person of another, to bring Vice in upon the stage speaking her own dialect, and, themselves being armed with an Uncion of self-confident impunity, have not scrupled to handle and touch that familiarly, which would be death to others. Milton in the person of Satan has started speculations hardier than any which the feeble armoury of the atheist ever furnished; and the precise strait-laced Richardson has strengthened Vice, from the mouth of Lovelace, with entangling sophistries and abstruse pleas against her adversary Virtue which Sedley, Villiers, and Rochester, wanted depth of libertinism sufficient to have invented.



And here are other shrewd and penetrating observations of this new critic of thirty-three. On "Old Fortunatus":—

The humour of a frantic Lover is here done to the life. Orleans is as passionate an Inamorato as any which Shakspeare ever drew. He is just such another adept in Love's reasons. The sober people of the world are with him  
a swarm of fools

Crowding together to be counted wise.

He talks "pure Biron and Romeo," he is almost as poetical as they, quite as philosophical, only a little madder. After all, Love's Sectaries are a "reason unto themselves." We have gone retrograde in the noble Heresy since the days when Sidney proselyted our nation to this mixed health and disease; the kindest symptom yet the most alarming crisis in the ticklish state of youth; the nourisher and the destroyer of hopeful wits; the mother of twin-births, wisdom and folly, valour and weakness; the servitude above freedom; the gentle mind's religion; the liberal superstition.

On "Byron's Tragedy":—

But passion (the all in all in Poetry) is everywhere present, raising the low, dignifying the mean, and putting sense into the absurd.

On "A Fair Quarrel":—

The insipid levelling morality to which the modern stage is tied down would not admit of such admirable passions as these scenes are filled with. A puritanical obtuseness of sentiment, a stupid infantile goodness, is creeping among us, instead of the vigorous passions, and virtues clad in flesh and blood, with which the old dramatists present us. Those noble and liberal casuists could discern in the differences, the quarrels, the animosities of man, a beauty and truth of moral feeling, no less than in the iterately inculcated duties of forgiveness and atonement. With us all is hypocritical meekness. A reconciliation scene (let the occasion be never so absurd or unnatural) is always sure of applause. Our audiences come to the theatre to be complimented on their goodness. They compare notes with the amiable characters in the play, and find a wonderful similarity of disposition between them.

And finally, from the criticism on "The Case is Altered":—

The passion for wealth has worn out much of its grossness by tract of time. Our ancestors certainly conceived of money as able to confer a distinct gratification in itself, not alone considered simply as a symbol of wealth. The old poets, when they introduce a miser, constantly make him address his gold as his mistress; as something to be seen, felt, and hugged; as capable of satisfying two of the senses at least. The substitution of a thin unsatisfying medium for the good old tangible gold, has made avarice quite a Platonic affection in comparison with the seeing, touching, and handling pleasures of the old Chrysophilites. A bank-note can no more satisfy the touch of a true sensualist in this passion, than Creusa could return her husband's embrace in the shades.

The purpose of the *Specimens* Lamb thus explained: "My leading design has been, to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors. To show in what manner they

felt, when they placed themselves by the power of imagination in trying situations, in the conflicts of duty and passion, or the strife of contending duties; what sort of loves and enmities theirs were; how their griefs were tempered, and their full-sworn joys abated: how much of Shakspeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind." In the present day there is no lack of discriminating appreciation of Shakspeare's contemporaries; but it must be remembered that although by a few scholars the old dramatists were well known Lamb was the first to bring the glint of the treasure to the eyes of the ordinary reader. He was quickly followed by others; but it was his book that showed the way. Lamb was always proud of the feat; in 1827, in the half-humorous biography of himself which he wrote for a friend, he remarked that he was "the first to draw the public attention to the old English dramatists in a work called 'Specimens of English Dramatic Writers who lived about the time of Shakspeare.'"

The year 1808 saw the publication also of Lamb's *Adventures of Ulysses*, and, at the end, of *Mrs. Leicester's School* (dated 1809). Both books were issued by Mrs. Godwin, who now put her own name to her publications, and had moved the business from Hanway Street to 41 Skinner Street, Holborn.

*Mrs. Leicester's School* was Mary Lamb's book even more than the *Tales from Shakspear*, for of its ten stories all but three were hers, and they were written probably without any hint or help from her brother. The story of "The Young Mahomedan," from which I have already quoted, in Chapter III., "The Sailor Uncle" and "The Visit to the Cousins," contain, I think, the best of Mary Lamb's sweet and simple prose. Charles Lamb's story of "The Witch Aunt" (from which I have quoted, in Chapter II.) could not, I think, be improved in any direction; while "The Sea Voyage" and "First Visit to Church," his other contributions, have a wistful fragrance that only he could impart. The book has never had the favour it deserved, and probably now never will, since children are receding every year farther from such simplicity as distinguishes it. Its old-fashioned and rather formal machinery has perhaps been against it; but those who love the stories (which must be loved ere they will seem worthy of love) love them exceedingly. Landor was moved to eloquent rapture by "The Father's Wedding Day."

The *Adventures of Ulysses*, which was wholly by Lamb, has had much less popularity; but it is an admirably told tale occupying a very high place in the literature for children.

Mary Lamb's letter to Sarah Hazlitt of December 10th, 1808—the last of the year—gives a hint of a dramatic work of Lamb's of which all trace has vanished. "The Sheffington is quite out now, my brother having got drunk with claret and Tom Sheridan. This visit, and the occasion of it, is a profound secret, and therefore I tell it to nobody but you and Mrs. Reynolds. Through the medium of Wroughton, there came an invitation and proposal from T. S., that C. L. should write some scenes in a speaking pantomime, the other parts of which Tom now, and his father formerly, have manufactured between them. So, in the Christmas holydays, my brother and his two great associates, we expect, will be all three damned together: this is, I mean, if Charles's share, which is done and sent in, is accepted."

P. G. Patmore, in his book *My Friends and Acquaintances*, refers to a comic opera, now in the British Museum, as being the work in question; but I cannot share his view either that the MS. is in Lamb's handwriting, or that it represents scenes in a speaking pantomime. It is more than likely that Lamb's contribution either was useless for the Sheridans' purpose or was destroyed in the fire at Drury Lane in February, 1809.

In the same letter Mary Lamb remarks, "You cannot think how very much we miss you and H. [Hazlitt] of a Wednesday evening. All the glory of the night, I may say, is at an end. Phillips makes his jokes, and there is no one to applaud him; Rickman argues, and there is no one to oppose him. The worst miss of all to me is, that, when we are in the dismal, there is now no hope of relief from any quarter whatsoever. Hazlitt was most brilliant, most ornamental, as a Wednesday-man; but he was a more useful one on common days, when he dropt in after a quarrel or a fit of the glooms." Lamb adds at the end: "There came this morning a printed prospectus from S. T. Coleridge, Grasmere, of a weekly paper, to be called *The Friend*—a flaming prospectus—I have no time to give the heads of it—to commence first Saturday in January. There came also a notice of a Turkey from Mr. Clarkson, which I am more sanguine in expecting the accomplishment of than I am of Coleridge's prophecy."



## CHAPTER XXV

1809 AND 1810

The Move to No. 4 Inner Temple Lane—Robert Lloyd in London—The Godwins at Home—*Poetry for Children*—Two Visits to Winterslow—Mary Lamb Ill Again—Teetotal Experiments—The *Reflector*.

THE principal event in the Lambs' life in 1809 was their removal from Mitre Court Buildings, their comfortable home since 1801, to No. 4 Inner Temple Lane, viâ Southampton Buildings, where they stayed for a brief while. None of these three buildings now remain.

Lamb sends the news to Manning in the letter of March 28th. "Don't come any more to Mitre Court Buildings. We are at 34, Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, and shall be here till about the end of May: then we remove to No. 4, Inner Temple Lane, where I mean to live and die; for I have such horror of moving, that I would not take a benefice from the King, if I was not indulged with non-residence. . . . Was I Diogenes, I would not move out of a kilderkin into a hogshead, though the first had had nothing but small beer in it, and the second reeked claret. Our place of final destination,—I don't mean the grave, but No. 2 [4] Inner Temple Lane,—looks out upon a gloomy churchyard-like court, called Hare Court, with three trees and a pump in it. Do you know it? I was born near it, and used to drink at that pump when I was a Recha-bite of six years old." The same letter states that Holcroft has just died. Lamb adds, "How do you like the little Mandarin-esses? are you on some little footing with any of them?"

Writing to Coleridge on June 7th, to congratulate him on the appearance of the *Friend*, the first number of which was dated June 1st, 1809, Lamb gives particulars of his new home. "I have two rooms on third floor and five rooms above, with an inner staircase to myself. and all new painted, &c., and all for

£30 a year! I came into them on Saturday week; and on Monday following, Mary was taken ill with fatigue of moving, and affected, I believe, by the novelty of the home; she could not sleep, and I am left alone with a maid quite a stranger to me, and she has a month or two's sad distraction to go through. What sad large pieces it cuts out of life—out of *her* life, who is getting rather old; and we may not have many years to live together. I am weaker, and bear it worse than I ever did. But I hope we shall be comfortable by and bye." Mary Lamb's illness made it necessary to postpone a visit to the Hazlitts at Winterslow, which was to have been paid in July, until later in the year.

We have sight of some of Lamb's circle in the ecstatic letters of Robert Lloyd to his wife in March and April, 1809. He was then on a visit to London, passing excitedly from one lion to another—from Godwin to Lamb, from Mrs. Siddons to James White, and so forth. The glimpses of the Godwin household are priceless. Late in March, 1809, he writes: "We supped with *Godwin*, and from him I am this moment returned, (twelve o'clock). You would, I know, my dear love, have been delighted in beholding his family; he appears to keep no servants, and his children to occupy their places. I was much gratified in seeing the three children of Mrs. Wollstonecraft, two girls and a son. One of the girls, the eldest, is a sweet, unaffected creature about fourteen. She handed me porter, and attracted much of my attention. Mrs. Godwin is *not* a pleasant woman, a wife far different from the one you would suppose *such* a man would have selected." Again, on March 31st: "I drank tea in company with Mr. Godwin last night; he is a most delightful Man—the modulation of his voice was beautiful, and his language uncommonly correct. I shall call upon him again to-morrow, to give him an order; poor Man, he is much to be felt for." And on April 3rd: "I spent Saturday Evening with Mr. Godwin. He is a delightful man, and mild as a child—his accents are most fascinating. The Picture of Mrs. Wollstonecraft [hangs] over the fireplace."

But this passage is the gem of Robert Lloyd's London letters: "I spent yesterday [April 2nd] with Lamb and his sister—it is sweetly gratifying to see them. They were not up when I went. Mary (his sister) the moment I entered the Room, calling from

her chamber, said—‘Robert, I am coming.’ They appear to sleep in Rooms next each other. If we may use the expression, their Union of affection is what we conceive of marriage in Heaven. They are the World *one* to the *other*. They are writing a Book of Poetry for children together.”

*Poetry for Children*, “entirely original, by the Author of *Mrs. Leicester’s School*,” which Mrs. Godwin published in two volumes in the summer of 1809, is now excessively rare. The verses, though not equal in dramatic interest, and indeed seldom in technique, to the *Original Poems* by Ann and Jane Taylor and Adelaide O’Keeffe, with which they were, I imagine, intended by the publisher to compete, have much charm and sweetness; and they form another illustration of the imaginative power of this old bachelor and old maid (to use Lamb’s phrase) in divining what things interest children, and of the tenacity of their memory of their own infancy. Throughout the two little volumes charity, tolerance, thoughtfulness—those watchwords of the two authors—are much insisted upon, directly and indirectly.

Although the poems are unsigned it is not difficult to apportion most of the pieces to their respective writers. One of the most charming of Charles Lamb’s contributions is this:—

#### THE DESSERT

With the apples and the plums  
 Little Carolina comes,  
 At the time of the dessert she  
 Comes and drops her new last curt’sy;  
 Graceful curt’sy, practis’d o’er  
 In the nursery before.  
 What shall we compare her to?  
 The dessert itself will do.  
 Like preserves she’s kept with care,  
 Like blanch’d almonds she is fair,  
 Soft as down on peach her hair,  
 And so soft, so smooth is each  
 Pretty cheek as that same peach,  
 Yet more like in hue to cherries;  
 Then her lips, the sweet strawberries,  
 Caroline herself shall try them  
 If they are not like when nigh them;  
 Her bright eyes are black as sloes,  
 But I think we’ve none of those  
 Common fruit here—and her chin  
 From a round point does begin,  
 Like the small end of a pear;



Whiter drapery she does wear  
 Than the frost on cake; and sweeter  
 Than the cake itself, and neater,  
 Though bedeck'd with emblems fine,  
 Is our little Caroline.

And in this beautiful and touching little story we see the flower of the more serious of the poems, which I should like to think was from Mary Lamb's pen:—

## BLINDNESS

In a stage-coach, where late I chanc'd to be,  
 A little quiet girl my notice caught;  
 I saw she look'd at nothing by the way,  
 Her mind seem'd busy on some childish thought.

I with an old man's courtesy address'd  
 The child, and call'd her pretty dark-eyed maid,  
 And bid her turn those pretty eyes and see  
 The wide extended prospect. "Sir," she said,  
 "I cannot see the prospect, I am blind."  
 Never did tongue of child utter a sound  
 So mournful, as her words fell on my ear.  
 Her mother then related how she found

Her child was sightless. On a fine bright day  
 She saw her lay her needlework aside,  
 And, as on such occasions mothers will,  
 For leaving off her work began to chide.

"I'll do it when 'tis day-light, if you please;  
 I cannot work, Mamma, now it is night."  
 The sun shone bright upon her when she spoke,  
 And yet her eyes receiv'd no ray of light.

One piece, "The Beggar Man," which I quote in Chapter XXVIII., was contributed by John Lamb the younger. In the little fables that occur from time to time we may perhaps see the paternal influence, the apologue drawn from bird life being evidently a favourite form with John Lamb the elder, as a glance at Appendix IV. will show.

*Poetry for Children* was allowed quickly to go out of print in England, and the two little volumes are now of extreme rarity. Many of the pieces reappeared in compilations by W. F. Mylius, a schoolmaster whose works were published by the Godwins; while an American edition was issued in Boston in 1812.

In the same letter to Coleridge from which I have quoted above—June 7th—Lamb speaks of his literary plans. "We have

almost worked ourselves out of child's work, and I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think of a drama, but I have no head for play-making; I can do the dialogue, and that's all. I am quite aground for a plan, and I must do something for money. Not that I have immediate wants, but I have prospective ones. O money, money, how blindly thou hast been worshipped, and how stupidly abused! Thou art health, and liberty, and strength; and he that has thee may rattle his pockets at the foul fiend!"

Besides the rhymed story of *Prince Dorus* for Godwin (and possibly but, I think, most improbably, that of *Beauty and the Beast* for the same publisher), we know of nothing more from Lamb's pen until his essays for Leigh Hunt's *Reflector* in 1811-12.

One more quotation from the letter to Coleridge of June 7th: "Have you read 'Cœlebs?'"<sup>1</sup> It has reached eight editions in so many weeks; yet literally it is one of the very poorest sort of common novels, with the draw-back of dull religion in it. Had the religion been high and flavoured, it would have been something. I borrowed this 'Cœlebs in Search of a Wife' of a very careful, neat lady, and returned it with this stuff written in the beginning:—

'If ever I marry a wife  
I'd marry a landlord's daughter,  
For then I may sit in the bar,  
And drink cold brandy-and-water.'

The next letter to Coleridge—dated October 30th—has news. "I have but this moment received your letter, dated the 9th instant, having just come off a journey from Wiltshire, where I have been with Mary on a visit to Hazlitt. The journey has been of infinite service to her. We have had nothing but sunshiny days and daily walks from eight to twenty miles a-day, have seen Wilton, Salisbury, Stonehenge, &c. Her illness lasted but six weeks; it left her weak, but the country has made us whole." The visit to Winterslow was made in company with Martin Burney and his uncle, Lieut.-Col. Molesworth Phillips, who married Susannah Elizabeth Burney. Martin and Phillips stayed, however, only for two weeks.

Hazlitt has given us, in his "Farewell to Essay Writing" (in *Winterslow*), a glimpse of his other visitors: "I used to walk

<sup>1</sup> By Hannah More.

out at this time with Mr. and Miss Lamb of an evening, to look at the Claude Lorraine skies over our heads melting from azure into purple and gold, and to gather mushrooms, that sprung up at our feet, to throw into our hashed mutton at supper." And in a letter to Manning a little later Lamb tells of one of the lighter incidents of the holiday. "A constable in Salisbury Cathedral was telling me that eight people dined at the top of the spire of the cathedral; upon which I remarked, that they must be very sharp-set."

Writing to Sarah Hazlitt on November 7th, Mary Lamb says, "The dear, quiet, lazy, delicious month we spent with you is remembered by me with such regret, that I feel quite discontent and Winterslow-sick. I assure you, I never passed such a pleasant time in the country in my life, both in the house and out of it, the card playing quarrels, and a few gaspings for breath after your swift footsteps up the high hills, excepted; and those drawbacks are not unpleasant in the recollection. We have got some salt butter to make our toast seem like yours, and we have tried to eat meat suppers, but that would not do, for we left our appetites behind us. . . ."

Mary Lamb adds a piece of good news: "A man in the India House has resigned, by which Charles will get twenty pounds a year; and White has prevailed on him to write some more lottery-puffs. If that ends in smoke, the twenty pounds is a sure card, and has made us very joyful." The addition of the £20 would bring Lamb's salary to £160, exclusive of the gratuities and money for overtime. Of his lottery puffs we shall probably never know any more. They were, I imagine, written for Bish, the principal Lottery contractor, whose devices to interest speculators were very varied and ingenious.

The correspondence of 1810 opens with a letter to Robert Lloyd—the last that was to be; and on January 2nd Lamb sends Manning a light-hearted medley of truth and fancy. "I have published a little book for children on titles of honour: and to give them some idea of the difference of rank and gradual rising, I have made a little scale, supposing myself to receive the following various accessions of dignity from the king, who is the fountain of honour—As at first, 1, Mr. C. Lamb; 2, C. Lamb, Esq.; 3, Sir C. Lamb, Bart.; 4, Baron Lamb of Stamford, where my family came from: I have chosen that if ever I should have



my choice ; 5, Viscount Lamb ; 6, Earl Lamb ; 7, Marquis Lamb ; 8, Duke Lamb. It would look like quibbling to carry it on further, and especially as it is not necessary for children to go beyond the ordinary titles of sub-regal dignity in our own country, otherwise I have sometimes in my dreams imagined myself still advancing, as 9th, King Lamb ; 10th, Emperor Lamb ; 11th, Pope Innocent ; higher than which is nothing but the Lamb of God."

In the letter to Coleridge of October 30th, 1809, Lamb had described his Inner Temple Lane rooms : "I have put up shelves. You never saw a book-case in more true harmony with the contents, than what I've nailed up in a room, which, though new, has more aptitudes for growing old than you shall often see—as one sometimes gets a friend in the middle of life, who becomes an old friend in a short time. My rooms are luxurious ; one is for prints and one for books ; a Summer and a Winter parlour. When shall I ever see you in them?" He describes them more fully to Manning : "I have two of these rooms on the third floor, and five sleeping, cooking, &c., rooms, on the fourth floor. In my best room is a choice collection of the works of Hogarth, an English painter of some humour. In my next best are shelves containing a small but well-chosen library. My best room commands a court, in which there are trees and a pump, the water of which is excellent—cold with brandy, and not very insipid without. Here I hope to set up my rest, and not quit till Mr. Powell, the undertaker, gives me notice that I may have possession of my last lodging. He lets lodgings for single gentlemen."

Before passing to 1810 I would say that in 1809 were born both Edward FitzGerald and Alfred Tennyson.

The year 1810 begins with a long blank interval, in part of which it is more than likely that Mary Lamb was ill ; but in July she was well enough to visit Winterslow again. On this occasion the Lambs returned by way of Oxford, travelling thus far in Hazlitt's company. In Hazlitt's essay "On the Conversation of Authors" we read : "L. once came down into the country to see us. He was 'like the most capricious poet Ovid among the Goths.' The country people thought him an oddity, and did not understand his jokes. It would be strange if they had ; for he did not make any, while he staid. But when we crossed the country to Oxford, then he spoke a

little. He and the old colleges were 'hail-fellow well met;' and in the quadrangles, he 'walked gowned.'<sup>1</sup> In another essay on "The Character of the Country People," in the *Examiner* in 1819, Hazlitt describes how Lamb ordered some brown or snuff-coloured breeches from the local tailor, but was fitted instead with a pair of lively Lincoln green, in which, however, he insisted on riding in triumph to Newbury and Oxford in the carrier's cart; "the abstract idea of the jest of the thing prevailing in his mind (as it always does) over the sense of personal dignity". The 1810 holiday was not so happy as that of the previous year, and it ended in another attack of illness for Mary Lamb which lasted well into September.

A letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to Crabb Robinson on November 6th has bad news. "I am much afraid that Miss Lamb is very poorly. . . . Charles speaks of the necessity of absolute quiet and at the same time of being obliged sometimes to have company that they would be better without. Surely in such a case as theirs it would be right to select whom they will admit. . . . Pray, as you are most likely to see *Charles* at least from time to time, tell me how they are going on. There is nobody in the world out of our own house for whom I am more deeply interested." Mary Lamb was not, I think, ill in her ordinary sense of the word—that is mentally—but only physically. She did not leave the Temple and was able to write letters.

Writing to Hazlitt on November 28th, thanking him for a pig, Lamb amplifies Miss Wordsworth's account. "Mary has been very ill indeed since you saw her; that is, as ill as she can be to remain at home. But she is a good deal better now, owing to a very careful regimen. She drinks nothing but water, and never goes out; she does not even go to the Captain's. Her indisposition has been ever since that night you left town; the night Miss W[ordsworth] came. Her coming, and that d——d Mrs. Godwin coming and staying so late that night, so upset her that she lay broad awake all that night, and it was by a miracle that she escaped a very bad illness, which I thoroughly expected. I have made up my mind that she shall never have any one in the house again with her, and that no one shall sleep with her, not even for a night; for it is a very serious thing to be always

<sup>1</sup> The phrase is from Lamb's sonnet quoted on page 419.

living with a kind of fever upon her; and therefore I am sure you will take it in good part if I say that if Mrs. Hazlitt comes to town at any time, however glad we shall be to see her in the daytime, I cannot ask her to spend a night under our roof. Some decision we must come to, for the harassing fever that we have both been in, owing to Miss Wordsworth's coming, is not to be borne; and I would rather be dead than so alive."

Dorothy Wordsworth had visited the Lambs for a week in the summer and was intending to return to them in the autumn, from Christopher Wordsworth's at Binfield; but Mary Lamb's relapse made this impossible. Writing to her on November 13th, Mary Lamb gives news not only of herself but of Coleridge, who, the *Friend* being no more, had just come to London from Greta Hall intending to stay with the Montagus in Frith Street, Soho, for some months; but owing to an unhappy circumstance, of which we shall presently hear, he moved almost at once to the Morgans', at 7 Portland Place, Hammersmith, on a visit which, as it turned out, was to last more or less continuously for some five years. He seems to have been entertaining the idea of placing himself in the hands of Sir Anthony Carlisle with a view to conquering his drug habit.

Mary Lamb's other news is that she has a new servant, aged twenty-seven, of plain figure. Lamb adds a postscript: "Mary has left a little space for me to fill up with nonsense, as the Geographers used to cram monsters in the voids of their maps and call it Terra Incognita. She has told you how she has taken to water, like a hungry otter. I too limp after her in lame imitation, but it goes against me a little *at first*. I have been *aquavorous* now for full four days and it seems a moon. I am full of cramps, and rheumatisms, and cold internally, so that fire won't warm me, yet I bear all for virtue's sake. Must I then leave you, Gin, Rum, Brandy, Aqua Vitæ—pleasant jolly fellows? Damn Temperance and them that first invented it, some Ante Noahite. Coleridge has powdered his head, and looks like Bacchus, Bacchus ever sleek and young. He is going to turn sober, but his Clock has not struck yet."

In another joint letter to Dorothy Wordsworth, dated November 23rd, Mary Lamb remarks of water-drinking, that though "a flat thing," it has become very easy to her, and that Charles perseveres in it most manfully. Lamb adds: "We are in a



pickle. Mary from her affectation of physiognomy has hired a stupid big country wench, who looked honest, as she thought, and has been doing her work some days, but without eating—eats no butter nor meat, but prefers cheese with her tea for breakfast—and now it comes out that she was ill when she came, with lifting her mother about (who is now with God) when she was dying, and with riding up from Norfolk 4 days and nights in the waggon. She got advice yesterday and took something which has made her bring up a quart of blood, and she now lies, a dead weight upon our humanity, in her bed, incapable of getting up, refusing to go into an hospital, having no body in town but a poor asthmatic dying Uncle whose son lately married a drab who fills his house, and there is no where she can go, and she seems to have made up her mind to take her flight to heaven from our bed.—O God! O God!—for the little wheelbarrow which trundled the Hunchback from door to door to try the various charities of different professions of Mankind! Here's her Uncle just crawled up, he is far liker Death than She."

One glimpse of Lamb we have at the end of this year, in Crabb Robinson's reminiscences. Robinson seems to have been at 4 Inner Temple Lane on December 10th. He records: "A talk about Shakspeare. C. Lamb spoke with admiration of 'Love's Labours Lost' and 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' Coleridge did not concur. But they agreed in this, that not a line of 'Titus Andronicus' could have been written by Shakspeare."

Finally there is in late December, or early January, 1811, a letter from Mary Lamb to Sarah Hazlitt, telling her of various small events—a too social evening at Godwin's; another at the Burney's, when Charles's new water-drinking habit gave out; Mrs. Clarkson's illness; Mrs. Rickman's loss of a baby and Mrs. John Hazlitt's miscarriage. "I am glad I am an old maid; for, you see, there is nothing but misfortune in the marriage state."

Before passing to 1811 I should say that the year 1810 was important in Lamb's literary life by reason of an engagement which it brought him, brief but fruitful. He was now thirty-five, an age when surprises are over and a man knows fairly well what he is going to do; he had made many experiments; he had written a sentimental novel and comic paragraphs for the papers, a blank verse play, poetry, and a farce; he had worked dry his invention for the nursery, and he had re-discovered the old

dramatists ; but he had not yet discovered his own true line. The time was, however, drawing near ; for Leigh Hunt, and his brother John, a printer, had projected a new quarterly, to be called the *Reflector*, and to be written mainly by old Christ's Hospitalers, of whom Lamb was not least important. Among the others were Thomas Barnes and Barron Field, both of whom we shall see something of in the ensuing pages.

When Leigh Hunt first came to know Lamb at all intimately I have not discovered. He knew him by sight when he was still a boy at Christ's Hospital, as we have seen, but between then and 1810, when the *Reflector* was founded, is a blank. That John Lamb knew Hunt may be gathered from the circumstance that his name is among the subscribers to Hunt's *Juvenilia* in 1801. George Dyer's and Barron Field's are also there, while Cobbett took 12 copies.

The *Reflector* gave Lamb his first encouragement to spread his wings with some of the freedom that an essayist demands. He did not make the fullest use of it ; he was not yet ready to be the chartered egotist that he afterwards became : diffidence, humility, mistrust, stood in his way ; but it is not too much to say that had he lacked the preliminary training which his *Reflector* exercises gave him his *Elia* essays would have been the poorer. One indeed of the *Reflector* pieces afterwards became an *Elia* essay—the “Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People ;” while the fine critical acumen displayed in two of the *Reflector* essays, those upon Hogarth and Shakespeare's Tragedies, was never excelled in his later writings.

Lamb's letters—at this period very infrequent and uninforming—say nothing of his *Reflector* work, which we may suppose occupied most of the time he could spare from the office and from whist and talk, and which accounts largely for the poverty of the correspondence ; but that he held the *Reflector* papers in some honour is proved by the circumstance, as we shall see, that when in 1818 he collected his *Works* in prose and verse (thinking his literary career was over), he gave a place to all but two or three.

The *Reflector* ceased abruptly with its fourth number ; but its work, so far as we are concerned, was done.

## CHAPTER XXVI

1811

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* Begins—Lamb on Wordsworth and Coleridge—Lamb's Scotchman—Death of George Burnett—Lamb's Puns—*Prince Dorus*—"Poor Coleridge" and "Poor Lamb"—Hazlitt's Son Born—Death of Robert Lloyd—Coleridge and Lamb on Shakespeare—The Godwins.

WITH the year 1811 we begin regularly to see the Lamb household through the eyes of their familiar friend Henry Crabb Robinson—a peculiarly fortunate circumstance, since Lamb's correspondence is so meagre at this period. Robinson's *Diary* has been in part published under the editorship of the late Thomas Sadler; but very much was omitted, and what remained was often altered without, I think, any gain in force. With the permission of the trustees of Dr. Williams' Library, where the Crabb Robinson papers are preserved, I have made a new copy of such passages as relate to Lamb and his circle.

Stimulated by the perusal of the *Diary* of Thomas Holcroft which had been lent him by Holcroft's widow, afterwards Mrs James Kenney, Robinson made his first entry on January 8th, 1811. We come to Lamb at once:—

"January 8th, 1811:—Spent part of the evening with Charles Lamb (unwell) and his sister. He had just read the 'Curse of Kehama,' which he said he liked better than any of Southey's long poems. The descriptions he thought beautiful, particularly the finding of Kailyal by Ereenia. He liked the opening, and part of the description of hell; but, after all, he was not made happier by reading the poem. There is too much trick in it. The three statues and the vacant space for Kehama resemble a pantomime scene; and the love is ill managed. On the whole however, Charles Lamb thinks the poem infinitely superior to 'Thalaba.'

"We spoke of Wordsworth and Coleridge. To my surprise, Lamb asserted the latter to be the greater man. He preferred the 'Ancient Mariner' to anything Wordsworth had written. He thought the latter too apt to force his own individual feel-



ings on the reader, instead of, like Shakespeare, entering fully into the feelings of others. This, I observed, is very much owing to the lyrical character of Wordsworth's poems. And Lamb concluded by expressing high admiration of Wordsworth, and especially of the Sonnets. He also spoke in high praise of 'Hart-leap Well' as one of his most exquisite pieces; but did not think highly of the Leech-gatherer.

"Some one, speaking of Shakespeare, mentioned his anachronism in which Hector speaks of Aristotle. 'That's what Johnson referred to,' said Lamb, 'when he wrote—

And panting Time toils after him in vain.'

"The other day C. L. related to me a droll anecdote of Smith, whom we met at Godwin's. . . . He had been shewing S. an engraving of a female figure which he deems handsome, and on leaving it exclaimed, 'Well, what do you think of *my beauty*?' Smith became quite grave and embarrassed and said, 'Why, sir,—from all that I have heard of you as well as from what I have myself seen, I certainly entertain a very high opinion of your abilities, but I confess that I have not yet thought or formed any opinion concerning your personal pretensions!' [This incident, some ten years later, was recalled for use in the *Elia* essay "Imperfect Sympathies."] Smith is a Scotchman who was a long while prisoner in France. . . . 'He has a most literal understanding,' said C. L., 'and represented me as a gross flatterer because I out of fun paid a person in his presence some ridiculous compliments, which every one else understood, and called my sister the parasite of his wife because she praised one of her caps.'"

A few days later Robinson gives a dreary glimpse of two of Lamb's early acquaintances. "January 12, 1811:—Mrs. Chas. Aikin related to me a deplorable tale of the situation in which Mr. Burnet [George Burnett] . . . is at present, literally starving." Robinson mentions also the distress of Mrs. Fenwick (the wife of "Ralph Bigod") and records the determination to avoid all personal expense that is called for merely by indolence, or love of enjoyment or vanity, since he has so many impecunious and thriftless friends and acquaintances. Robinson took up Burnett's case with his customary stern kindness, and spoke of him to Walter of the *Times* and to Arthur Aikin; but, as we shall shortly see, it was too late.

"Sunday, Jan. 20, 1811 :—A long tête à tête with Mary Lamb. A confidential gossiping.

"Jan. 23, 1811 :—At C. Lamb's . . . Coleridge, Morgan, Rickman &c. Coleridge in bad form. Very wordy.

"Feb. 24, 1811 :—Evening, a very large party to supper. The Amyots, including Taylor of Norwich, Amyot's old friend and fellow clerk, the three Stansfields, Mrs. Holcroft, the Lambs, Tomalin, the Bakewells." Thomas Amyot, who had been a solicitor's clerk in Norwich, became private secretary to William Windham, M.P. (John Lamb's opponent in the matter of humanity to animals), and afterwards Registrar in London of the West India Slaves. Taylor, of Norwich, was, of course, William Taylor, the philosopher and critic, translator of Bürger and Goethe, a friend of Burnett and Southey, and George Borrow's instructor in German. The Stansfields were friends of Robinson. It was Tomalin, a friend of Robinson and the Colliers, who helped John Payne Collier to make a shorthand report of Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures in this year—the only record of them that we possess. Robert Bakewell was the geologist. The Lambs do not seem to have known intimately any of their fellow-guests except Mrs. Holcroft.

Robinson's next entry serves as an amusing footnote to Lamb's essay on George Dawe, now an A.R.A. :—

"March 4, 1811 :—Dawe shewed me a painting of a naked figure huddled up into itself in an attitude intended for a Mad Tom, but the figure he is sensible is too muscular for such a character. He thinks of converting him into the maniac mentioned in the New Testament.

"March 6, 1811 :—After dinner called on C. Lamb; heard from him that Geo. Burnett had died wretchedly in a work-house. Hazlitt and Coleridge were there and seemed sensibly affected by the circumstance. There certainly was every reason for strong sympathy, founded on similarity of pursuits and in a like want of fortune, and dependence on literary talents for support. Burnett's age was only thirty-four or five, a year younger than Lamb.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Part of Burnett's tragedy is perhaps explained by Coleridge's remark in a letter to Southey in 1804: "I met G. Burnett the day before yesterday in Lincoln's Inn Fields, so nervous, so helpless, with such opium-stupidly-wild eyes."

“March 8, 1811:—I then called on W. Hazlitt. Learnt that Miss Lamb had had a renewal of her attack. H. thinks that Burnett’s death occasioned the present relapse. . . . H. thinks that poor Miss L. as well as her brother is injured by Coleridge’s presence in town, and their frequent visits and constant company at home, which keep their minds in perpetual fever.”

Robinson repeats this opinion in a letter to his brother, Thomas Robinson, on March 14th: “Poor Mary Lamb has been attacked again by her shocking malady. It has been, I fear, precipitated by Coleridge’s company, which I think has a dreadful effect upon her nerves and shatters her frame. The conversation of such a man, whose eloquence is full of passion and mystical philosophy, a compound of poetry, metaphysics, plaintive egotism and diseased sensibility, continued for hours to a late hour in the night, is enough to disorder a sane but susceptible frame, much more rouse a dormant disease of imagination. Poor Coleridge is himself an object of compassion.”

Coleridge, writing to Robinson at this time, says, “I have been extremely unwell, though rather better. George Burnett’s death told too abruptly, and, in truth, exaggerated,<sup>1</sup> upset my dear, most dear, and most excellent friend and heart’s sister, Mary Lamb—and her illness has almost upset me. Troubles, God knows! have thronged about me—alas! alas! all my dearest friends I have of late either suffered *from* [a reference to Wordsworth, as we shall see], or suffered *for*. ’Tis a cruel sort of world we live in.”

The next entry, belonging to the same date, throws a little light on the occasional coolnesses which, before their serious breach, interrupted the intimacy of Lamb and Hazlitt:—

“March 8, 1811:—He [Hazlitt] had applied a little while before to C. L. for money which C. L. had not sent him, for he (W. H.) had before received relief from him (C. L.) with a promise not to apply again for six months. This circumstance agrees with what Mrs. C. Aikin related to me on Tuesday—he had offended them by an improper application to which they had shewn no attention.

<sup>1</sup> Meaning an exaggeration of the melancholy circumstances of Burnett’s death. Coleridge was not anticipating a famous pleasantry by Mark Twain.



“March 16, 1811 :—C. Lamb stepped in to announce Dr. Tuthill's defeat as candidate for the post of physician to St. Luke's Hospital. He accompanied me and Mrs. Collier to Covent Garden. *Cato* was acted . . . *Bluebeard* followed, to the delight of a crowded audience. C. L. was seemingly very merry—his sister's illness I dare say leaves him in no other state than outward affliction or violent and false spirits which he works himself into to subdue his real feeling.” Tuthill—afterwards Sir George—on a later occasion was elected to St. Luke's Hospital. Mrs. Collier was the wife of John Dyer Collier, and mother of John Payne Collier.

“March 29, 1811 :—I spent the evening with W. Hazlitt. Smith, his wife and son, Hume, Coleridge and afterwards Lamb were there. . . . Before Lamb came C. had spoken with warmth of his excellent serious conversation. H. imputed his puns to humility.” Smith was probably the Scotchman whom we met above; Hume was Joseph Hume of Somerset House, whom we have seen. Hazlitt's remark on Lamb's puns is very interesting: meaning, I take it, that Lamb often had wiser things to say than he would utter, but, fearing perhaps that he might go beyond the apprehension of certain of the company and make them uncomfortable, he preferred to maintain a lower and friendlier level by indulging in nonsense.

“March 30, 1811 :—Accompanied C. Lamb to the Lyceum. *The Siege of Belgrade* . . . Braham's singing. . . . On returning to C. L.'s found Coleridge and W. Hazlitt there. . . . When Dignum and Mrs. Bland came on the stage together, C. L. exclaimed

‘And lo, two puddings smoked upon the board!’<sup>1</sup>

“May 15, 1811 :—A very pleasant call on Charles and Mary Lamb. Read his version of the story of Prince Dorus, the long-nosed king. Gossipped about writing. Urged him to try his hand at a metrical *Umarbeitung* (working up) of ‘Reynard the Fox.’ He believed, he said, in the excellence of the work, but he was sure such a version as I suggested would not succeed now. The sense of humour, he maintained, is utterly extinct. No satire that is not personal will succeed. I spoke of ‘Rameau and Nephew.’ He spoke highly of it without knowing it was translated by me; having no idea where he had seen it. He urged

<sup>1</sup> Pope's Moral Essay III. (Epistle to Bathurst), 360.

me to show him whatever I had written about the German authors and literature." Robinson translated *Amatonda* from the German of Anton Wall (Christian Lebrecht Heyne) which, with a few fragments from Jean Paul Richter, was published anonymously by Longmans in 1811. "Rameau and Nephew" is by Diderot. Lamb's *Prince Dorus*, a fairy tale in rhyme, founded on the French, was published by Godwin in 1811.

"May 28, 1811:—Called on Godwin. Found C. Lamb and his sister there.

"June 3, 1811:—I concluded the evening with C. Lamb. I read him 'The Wanderer' and 'Cupid as Landscape Painter,' which he seemed to be pleased with." These are two sketches by Goethe, of which Robinson probably had made translations.

"June 13, 1811. Thursday:—A call on C. Lamb. His brother was with him. A chat on puns. He denied Pitchford's to be good [that Evanson, author of a work on the Dissonance of the Gospel stating St. Luke to be most worthy of credence, is a 'lukewarm Christian'] and quoted two as better. He was with a friend reading a book of travels in the east who observed of the Mantchu Tartars that they were cannibals, on which C. Lamb observed that the Chinese were certainly of the race of Celtes [Sell-teas]. The large room in the accountant's office at the East India House is divided into boxes or compartments, in each of which sit six clerks, Charles Lamb himself in one. They are called Compounds. The meaning of the word was asked one day, and Lamb said it was 'a collection of simples.' We spoke of the Stafford pictures. C. L. did not much admire the collection. He thought the 'Seasons' of Titian one of the finest, and the muleteer of Correggio most excellent merely for the wonderful expression of motion in the figures.

"June 21, 1811:—C. and M. Lamb, Dr. and Mrs. Adams, Barron Field, Wright and M. Andrews spent the evening. . . . We sat up late. C. L. was very merry; his puns were more numerous than select. He made one good pun. Field had said 'Who ever puns will steal—I always button my pockets when in company with a punster.' Some one said, 'Punsters have no pocket.' 'No,' said C. L., 'they have no pocket, they carry only a ridicule.'" The party was at the Colliers'. Dr. Joseph Adams was the biographer of Hunter and the friend who recommended Coleridge to the care of Gillman in 1816.

Waller Rodwell Wright was a lawyer, an old friend of Robinson, and the author of *Horae Ionicae*. Andrews was Mord Andrews.

"July 10 [Wednesday], 1811:—Took tea with C. Lamb, the Wednesday evening parties being resumed.

"July 21, 1811:—A call on C. Lamb. L. had met with an accident (H. Wadd had nearly put out his eye by throwing a pen full of ink into it)." Wodd was the India House clerk on whom Lamb wrote an epigram which I quote in Chapter XLII.

On July 24th, 1811, Robinson records that he went late to Lamb's and found a large party there, among them Southey, fresh from a visit to William Blake. There is no evidence that Lamb ever met Blake, but we know from a letter to Barton in 1824 that he admired him and understood him. Robinson records a most interesting conversation with the poet-painter.

"August 3rd, 1811:—In the evening at Charles Lamb's. He was serious, and therefore very interesting. I accidentally made use of the expression 'poor Coleridge!' Lamb corrected me, not angrily, but as if really pained. 'He is,' he said, 'a fine fellow, in spite of all his faults and weaknesses. Call him Coleridge; I hate *poor*, as applied to such a man. I can't bear to hear such a man pitied.' He then quoted an expression to the same effect by (I think) Ben Jonson, of Bacon."<sup>1</sup>

(I am tempted to quote here the following passage from Mr. Birrell's first series of *Obiter Dicta* :—

"One grows sick of the expressions, 'poor Charles Lamb,' 'gentle Charles Lamb,' as if he were one of those grown-up children of the Leigh Hunt type, who are perpetually begging and borrowing through the round of every man's acquaintance. Charles Lamb earned his own living, paid his own way, was the helper, not the helped; a man who was beholden to no one, who always came with gifts in his hand, a shrewd man, capable of advice, strong in council. Poor Lamb, indeed! Poor Coleridge, robbed of his will; poor Wordsworth, devoured by his own *ego*; poor Southey, writing his tomes and deeming himself a classic; poor Carlyle, with his nine volumes of memoirs, where he

'Lies like a hedgehog rolled up the wrong way,  
Tormenting himself with his prickles'—

<sup>1</sup>This would be the passage (from *Timber*): "Lord S. Alban. . . . My conceit of his person was never increased toward him by his place or honors. But I have and do reverence him for the greatness that was only proper to himself in that he seemed to me ever by his work one of the greatest men and most worthy of admiration that had been in many ages. In his adversity I ever prayed that God would give him strength; for greatness he could not want. Neither could I condole in a word or syllable for him, as knowing no accident could do harm to virtue, but rather help to make it manifest."



call these men poor, if you feel it decent to do so, but not Lamb, who was rich in all that makes life valuable or memory sweet. But he used to get drunk. This explains all. Be untruthful, unfaithful, unkind; darken the lives of all who have to live under your shadow, rob youth of joy, take peace from age, live unsought for, die unmourned—and remaining sober you will escape the curse of men's pity, and be spoken of as a worthy person. But if ever, amidst what Burns called 'social noise,' you so far forget yourself as to get drunk, think not to plead a spotless life spent with those for whom you have laboured and saved; talk not of the love of friends or of help given to the needy: least of all make reference to a noble self-sacrifice passing the love of women, for all will avail you nothing. You get drunk—and the heartless and the selfish and the lewd crave the privilege of pitying you, and receiving your name with an odious smile.”)

Crabb Robinson again:—

“August 25, 1811:—A call on C. Lamb late. I began *Faust* to him. He did not appear to relish it much, though he said it was good.” And here comes a long interval during Robinson's absence from town.

The Lambs, frightened perhaps by their experience of the previous year, did not leave London in the summer of 1811. Writing to Sarah Hazlitt on October 2nd (on the occasion of the birth of William Hazlitt, the younger), Mary Lamb says of her brother, “He is now looking over me, he is always in my way for he has had a month's holiday at home, but I am happy to say they end on Monday—when mine begin, for I am going to pass a week at Richmond with Mrs. Burney. She has been dying but she went to the Isle of Wight and recovered once more, and she is finishing her recovery at Richmond. When there I intend to read Novels and play at Piquet all day long.” Lamb adds a postscript to Hazlitt: “Well, my blessing and heaven's be upon him, and make him like his father, with something a better temper and a smoother head of hair, and then all the men and women must love him.”

Mr. W. C. Hazlitt prints in *Lamb and Hazlitt* some verses written on the occasion of the birth of William the younger. He does not ascribe them to any friend of the family in particular, but I think them very likely to be Mary Lamb's; and in that belief I quote them here.

There lives at Winterslow a man of such  
Rare talents and deep learning, that by much  
Too wise he's counted by his rustic neighbours;  
And all his learned literary labours  
Occasion give for many a wild surmise.  
Even his person in their rustic eyes  
Has somewhat strange in it, his sallow looks,

His deep o'erhanging brows when o'er his books  
 (Which written are in characters unknown)  
 He pores whole hours with a most solemn frown.  
 And then this wise man's wife they all well know  
 Is sister to a learned Doctor too.  
 But we will leave the rustics to their wonder,  
 And simply tell what truly happen'd under  
 This wise man's roof. He and his wife believ'd,  
 If by no inauspicious star deceiv'd,  
 The time was very fast approaching when  
 (To crown the labours of his brain and pen)  
 A nameless Spirit, for whose sake his brains  
 And pen he wore out, would reward his pains  
 By visible appearance in their view.  
 It was not from the magic art they drew  
 This inference. Lo! when the Spirit came,  
 The long expected One without a name,  
 For whose sweet sake all this was undergone,  
 They call'd it William and their own dear Son.

On October 26th, 1811, Robert Lloyd died, and Lamb sent to his brother, Charles Lloyd, a little memoir which was printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. I quote a few lines from the close: "It seemed as if the affectionate part of his nature could suffer no abatement. The display of what the world calls shining talents would have been incompatible with a character like his; but he oftentimes let fall, in his familiar conversation, and in his letters, bright and original illustrations of feeling which might have been mistaken for genius, if his own watchful modest spirit had not constantly interposed to recall and substitute for them some of the ordinary forms of observation which lay less out of the circle of common sympathy, within which his kind nature delighted to move."

Here we return to Crabb Robinson's *Diary* :—

"Nov. 4, 1811 :—After dinner, at Flaxman's, I read to F. Lamb's very fine essay on Hogarth (*Reflector 3*) which I had read before with great delight. F. acknowledged the literary merit of the piece but he by no means concurred in the opinion C. L. maintains that Hogarth is a moral painter. On the contrary F. asserted that he was a very wicked though most witty artist. . . ."

On December 5th Coleridge took "Romeo and Juliet" for the subject of his lecture in the course which he was delivering in Crane Court, Fleet Street. Robinson, writing of the lecture, says that "when C. was so extravagantly running from topic

to topic without any guide whatever, C. L. said: 'This is not so much amiss. C. said in his advertisement he would speak about the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet, and so he is delivering the lecture in the character of the Nurse.'

"December 10th, 1811:—Miss Lamb dined with us. After dinner gossipped. In the evening Charles Lamb, Manning,<sup>1</sup> and Mrs. Fenwick. A pleasant evening. Lamb spoke well about Shakespeare. I had objected to Coleridge's assertion in his lecture, that Shakespeare became everything except the vicious; and I observed that if Shakespeare *becoming* a character is to be determined by the truth and vivacity of his delineation, he had *become* some of the vicious characters as well as the virtuous. Lamb justified Coleridge's remark, by saying that Shakespeare never gives characters wholly odious and detestable. I adduced the King in 'Hamlet' as altogether mean; and he allowed this to be the worst of Shakespeare's characters. He has not another like it. I cited Lady Macbeth. 'I think this one of Shakespeare's worst characters,' said Lamb. 'It is also inconsistent with itself. Her sleep-walking does not suit so hardened a being.' . . . I then referred to the Bastard in 'Lear,' but Lamb considered his character as the result of provocation on account of his illegitimacy. Lamb mentioned Iago and Richard III. as admirable illustrations of the skill with which Shakespeare could make his worst characters interesting. I noticed King John and Lewis, as if Shakespeare meant, like a Jacobin, to show how base kings are. Lamb did not remark on this, but said, 'King John' is one of the plays he likes least. He praised 'Richard II.'"

On December 15th Robinson called on the Godwins—a duty-call rather than a pleasure, for he tells us he was rarely comfortable in their house. One of Godwin's remarks bears not only upon Coleridge's but upon Lamb's critical judgment: "Godwin noticed C.'s remark [in his lecture] that Shakespeare's plays are only to be read, not acted, as absolutely false." (Lamb of course said the same thing in his essay on Shakespeare's Tragedies in the *Reflector*.) Godwin added, "No plays but Shakespeare's deserve to be represented, so well are they fitted for performance. . . . On coming away Mrs. G. took

<sup>1</sup>Not of course Lamb's Manning, who was in China. James Manning (1781-1866), Serjeant-at-law and legal commentator.



me into another room and very angrily reproached me with not bearing anything from G. while I would take anything from C. Lamb." Robinson protested. He afterwards adds, "C. Lamb says rude things, but always in so playful a way that you are sure he means nothing by what he says. Mrs. G. also spoke of the persecution she has to bear from the Lambs, Mrs. Holcroft &c. But I would hear nothing on that subject." What Mrs. Godwin meant by the word "persecution" I do not know. Probably she was one of those persons who would cherish an imagined affront rather than be without any cause of complaint.

Among Robinson's papers in 1811 is a note that "turkies" were to be sent by his brother at Bury to Mrs. Collier, to C. Lamb, No. 4 Inner Temple Lane, and to Captain Burney, 26 James Street, Pimlico. His last entry is: "Dec. 31, 1811:— Closed the year most agreeably [at Flaxman's], I believe in the act of repeating C. Lamb's prologue to 'Mr. H.'"

In this year was born William Makepeace Thackeray.

## CHAPTER XXVII

1812

Hazlitt's Christening Party—Benjamin Robert Haydon—Thomas Barnes—  
 "The Triumph of the Whale"—The *Examiner* and the Prince Regent  
 —James Kenney—Coleridge's Quarrel with Wordsworth—Lamb as a  
 Landed Proprietor.

ONE letter only of Lamb's belonging to 1812 has been preserved, and that not a personal one—a criticism of a translation of Horacè made by Charles Lloyd, the elder, of Birmingham. Nor does Lamb seem to have written anything of importance, the articles in No. IV. of the *Reflector*, which was published in 1812, being, I think, the work of 1811.

Fortunately we have Crabb Robinson's *Diary*, or the year would be blank indeed. We see the Lambs at once: "January 1st, 1812 [Wednesday]:—In the evening with C. Lamb; whist and his usual party; cards and nothing but cards."

On the 14th Hazlitt gave his first lecture at the Russell Institution, on the History of English Philosophy. Robinson records that he read very fast without looking at his audience. On the 15th Hazlitt was at Lamb's, in depression about his lectures, which he meditated giving up.

The Hazlitts had just settled in town, having moved to 19 York Street, Westminster, where Milton once lived. It was there that the projected christening party for young William was held, as described by Benjamin Robert Haydon, the painter, who must now be added to the list of Lamb's friends. "In the midst of Hazlitt's weaknesses, his parental affections were beautiful. He had one boy. He loved him. He doated on him. He told me one night this boy was to be christened. 'Will ye come on Friday?' 'Certainly,' said I. His eye glistened. Friday came, but as I knew all parties I lunched heartily first and was there punctually at four. Hazlitt then

lived in Milton's house, Westminster, next door to Bentham. At four I came, but he was out. I walked up and found his wife ill by the fire in a bed gown—nothing ready for guests, and everything wearing the appearance of neglect and indifference. I said, 'Where is Hazlitt?' 'Oh dear, William has gone to look for a parson.' 'A parson; why, has he not thought of that before?' 'No, he didn't.' 'I'll go and look for him,' said I, and out I went into the park through Queen's Square and met Hazlitt in a rage coming home. 'Have ye got a parson?' 'No, sir,' said he, 'these fellows are all out.' 'What will ye do?' 'Nothing.' So in we walked, Hazlitt growling at all the parsons and the church.

"When we came in we sat down—nobody was come;—no table laid;—no appearance of dinner. On my life there is nothing so heartless as going out to dinner and finding no dinner ready. I sat down; the company began to drop in—Charles Lamb and his poor sister—all sorts of odd, clever people. Still no dinner. At last came in a maid who laid a cloth and put down knives and forks in a heap. Then followed a dish of potatoes, cold, waxy and yellow. Then came a great bit of beef with a bone like a battering-ram toppling on all its corners. Neither Hazlitt nor Lamb seemed at all disturbed, but set to work helping each other; while the boy, half clean and obstinate, kept squalling to put his fingers into the gravy. Even Lamb's wit and Hazlitt's disquisitions, in a large room, wainscotted and ancient, where Milton had meditated, could not reconcile me to such violation of all the decencies of life."

In the year 1812 Haydon was twenty-six, and was fairly well known as a painter by virtue of his "Dentatus." He had, however, begun his quarrel with the Academy, partly because they preferred George Dawe to himself as an Associate in 1809, and partly because in the same year they had hung "Dentatus" badly. He had, however, good friends in Lord Mulgrave, Wilkie and Sir George Beaumont, and although his persistent wrong-headedness had already asserted itself he seemed to be on the edge of a great career. Of Lamb we have some pleasant glimpses in his journals; but the two men can never have been very intimate.

Writing of Lamb and Haydon in *Notes and Queries* in 1859, Mr. James Elmes said, "The last few times I saw my two friends together were the private view of the above-laureated picture



["Christ's Entry into Jerusalem," upon which Lamb wrote some verses both in English and Latin]; at the *Champion* office with Mr. John Scott [of whom we see much in Haydon's *Diary*, and who afterwards edited the *London Magazine*]; and once or twice in evening parties at the painter's house, Lisson Grove, North. Lamb and Haydon were often like boys, so boisterous in their mirth and hilarity." One of their hilarious evenings is described by Haydon in a later chapter.

To return to Hazlitt, whose association with Lamb was now at its closest, I might quote at this point the description by Talfourd, which although it belongs to a slightly later period is yet opportune: "His countenance was then handsome, but marked by a painful expression; his black hair, which had curled stiffly over his temples, had scarcely received its first tints of grey; his gait was awkward; his dress was neglected; and, in the company of strangers, his bashfulness was almost painful—but when, in the society of Lamb and one or two others, he talked on his favourite themes of old English books, or old Italian pictures, no one's conversation could be more delightful. The poets, from intercourse with whom he had drawn so much of his taste, and who had contributed to shed the noble infection of beauty through his reasoning faculties, had scarcely the opportunity of appreciating their progress."

Crabb Robinson resumes:—

"January 17th, 1812:—At 10 went to Barron Field's [at No. 4 Hare Court Temple]. C. Lamb, and Leigh Hunt and Mrs. Hills there. Lamb and Hunt, I found, had had a contest about Coleridge. H. had spoken of him as a bad writer, L. as of the first man he ever knew. The dispute was revived by me, but nothing remarkable was said. C. L., who soon became tipsy, in his droll extravagant way abused every one who denied the transcendency, while H. dryly denied the excellency of his writings and expressed his regret that he did not know him personally. H. took L.'s speeches in good part, evidently by his manner showed his respect for his talents, while C. L. to make his freedom endurable praised Hunt's remarks on Fuseli (a praise H. seemed to relish). I spoke about Hazlitt's lectures in terms of great praise, but C. L. would not join me, and I fear I did not succeed in my object. I left C. L. getting very drunk, and I understand the party remained up till late. I staid only till 12.

“January 21st, 1812:—Hazlitt read half his first lecture at B. Montagu’s last night. He was to read the whole, but abruptly broke off and would not be persuaded to read the remainder. Lamb and other friends were there.” On the 21st Hazlitt gave the lecture with an improved delivery.

“February 5th, 1812:—A wet walk to Captain Burney’s; a mere card party as usual. . . . Miss Lamb pointed out to me a passage in the *Quarterly Review* against her brother, which I think in brutality surpasses anything even in the *Edinburgh Review*.” This was Gifford’s allusion to Lamb’s comments on John Ford’s play, in the *Dramatic Specimens*, as “the blasphemies of a maniac.” Gifford afterwards made an effort to explain it away, but it was impossible to undo the pain caused by such a blunder.<sup>1</sup>

“February 26th, 1812:—Call . . . on C. Lamb for a short time; poor C. L. having been with me, saying his sister was again ill but he wished me to come as usual. I found the usual party at whist, but grave.

“March 16th, 1812:—To Charles Lamb, with whom were Barron Field, Leigh Hunt, and Barnes. The latter with a somewhat *feist* appearance, has a good countenance, and is a man who, I dare say, will make his way in the world. He has talents and activity, and inducements to activity. He has obtained high honours at Cambridge, and is now a candidate for a fellowship. He reports for Walter.” This was Thomas Barnes, a schoolfellow of Leigh Hunt at Christ’s Hospital, who, introduced to the *Times* as a reporter by Barron Field, became its first great editor in 1817. Barnes was a man of notable clearness of mind and sarcastic speech. Leigh Hunt, to whose *Reflector* and *Examiner* he contributed, said of him that “he might have made himself a name in wit in literature, had he cared much for anything beyond his glass of wine and his Fielding.” Barnes, who made the *Times* a power, was succeeded by John Delane.

Lamb tells us nothing of Barnes, but Talfourd gives us a glimpse of the two men in company: “I well remember him, late one evening, in the year 1816, when only two or three friends remained with Lamb and his sister, long after ‘we had heard the chimes at midnight,’ holding inveterate but delighted

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. I. of my edition of Lamb’s *Works*, pages 447, 448.

controversy with Lamb, respecting the tragic power of Dante as compared with that of Shakspeare. Dante was scarcely known to Lamb; for he was unable to read the original, and Cary's noble translation was not then known to him; and Barnes aspired to the glory of affording him a glimpse of a kindred greatness in the mighty Italian with that which he had conceived incapable of human rivalry. The face of the advocate of Dante, heavy when in repose, grew bright with earnest admiration as he quoted images, sentiments, dialogues, against Lamb, who had taken his own immortal stand on Lear, and urged the supremacy of the child-changed father against all the possible Ugolinos of the world. Some reference having been made by Lamb to his own exposition of Lear, which had been recently published in a magazine, edited by Leigh Hunt, under the title of the *Reflector*, touched another and a tenderer string of feeling, turned a little the course of his enthusiasm the more to inflame it, and brought out a burst of affectionate admiration for his friend, then scarcely known to the world, which was the more striking for its contrast with his usually sedate demeanour. I think I see him now, leaning forward upon the little table on which the candles were just expiring in their sockets, his fists clenched, his eyes flashing, and his face bathed in perspiration, exclaiming to Lamb, 'And do I not know, my boy, that you have written about Shakspeare, and Shakspeare's own Lear, finer than any one ever did in the world, and won't I let the world know it?'"<sup>1</sup>

To return to Robinson's entry for March 16th. He continues, "Charles Lamb was in his best humour—very good-humoured, but at the same time solid. I never heard him talk to greater advantage. He wrote last week in the *Examiner* some capital lines, 'The Triumph of the Whale,' and this occasioned the con-

<sup>1</sup> One joke that is usually given to Lamb is credited, says Cowden Clarke, also to Barnes: the reply to the tiresomely maternal lady who asked how he liked babies—"Boiled, ma'am."

The story is in the same manner as that excellent one which tells how Lamb put an end to a fellow guest's inquiries as to his acquaintance with persons of note: "Do you know So-and-so? Do you know thus-and-thus?" At last, 'Do you know Miss ——?' "No, madam, I do not; but damn her at a venture." The kindest and most patient endurer of certain types of dulness (so long as it was genuine or not pretentious), Lamb seems to have been unable to suffer a fool.



versation to take more of a political turn than is usual with Lamb. Leigh Hunt is an enthusiast, very well-intentioned, and I believe prepared for the worst. He said, pleasantly enough, 'No one can accuse me of not writing a libel. Everything is a libel, as the law is now declared, and our security lies only in their shame.' He talked on the theatre, and showed on such points great superiority over the others."

I print here Lamb's verses on the Prince of Wales—"The Triumph of the Whale"—as an example of his daring as a political satirist.

#### THE TRIUMPH OF THE WHALE

Io! Pæan! Io! sing  
 To the finny people's King.  
 Not a mightier whale than this  
 In the vast Atlantic is;  
 Not a fatter fish than he  
 Flounders round the Polar sea.  
 See his blubbers—at his gills  
 What a world of drink he swills,  
 From his trunk, as from a spout,  
 Which next moment he pours out.  
 Such his person—next declare,  
 Muse, who his companions are.—  
 Every fish of generous kind  
 Scuds aside, or slinks behind;  
 But about his presence keep  
 All the Monsters of the Deep;  
 Mermaids, with their tails and singing  
 His delighted fancy stinging;  
 Crooked Dolphins, they surround him,  
 Dog-like Seals, they fawn around him.  
 Following hard, the progress mark  
 Of the intolerant salt sea shark.  
 For his solace and relief,  
 Flat fish are his courtiers chief.  
 Last and lowest in his train,  
 Ink-fish (libellers of the main)  
 Their black liquor shed in spite:  
 (Such on earth the things *that write*).  
 In his stomach, some do say,  
 No good thing can ever stay.  
 Had it been the fortune of it  
 To have swallowed that old Prophet,  
 Three days there he'd not have dwell'd,  
 But in one have been expell'd.  
 Hapless mariners are they,  
 Who beguil'd (as seamen say),

Deeming him some rock or island,  
 Footing sure, safe spot, and dry land,  
 Anchor in his scaly rind;  
 Soon the difference they find;  
 Sudden plumb, he sinks beneath them;  
 Does to ruthless waves bequeath them.

Name or title what has he?  
 Is he Regent of the Sea?  
 From this difficulty free us,  
 Buffon, Banks or sage Linnæus.  
 With his wondrous attributes  
 Say what appellation suits.  
 By his bulk, and by his size,  
 By his oily qualities,  
 This (or else my eyesight fails),  
 This should be the PRINCE OF WHALES.

The lines were printed in the *Examiner*, Leigh Hunt's paper, on March 15th, a week earlier than Leigh Hunt's famous article on the Prince, styling him "a corpulent man of fifty . . . a violator of his vow, a libertine over head and ears in disgrace, a despiser of domesticities, a companion of gamblers and demireps. . . ." No notice was taken of Lamb's couplets, but Hunt's unequivocal prose was destined to be too much for the royal party. Robinson records, under March 30th: "Stepped late to Barron Field's chambers; Barnes, Lamb, J. Collier. We talked about Hunt, whose indiscreet article against the Prince even his friends censure. L. and B. disputed about Wordsworth." The Hunts were prosecuted in due course; the trial being held in December of 1812. Brougham defended, but a sentence of two years' imprisonment was passed. To this, however, we shall come later.

"April 4th, 1812:—Took tea with C. Lamb, where were Kenney and his bride, the late Mrs. Holcroft. C. Lamb had but just heard of the marriage . . . and was infinitely droll. He said [to Mrs. Kenney] he expected his presents back again, and asked 'That is all that has passed between us, is it not?' The bride was in her usual good spirits, and K. has all the appearance of an amiable, but at the same time, a nervous, feeble-bodied man." James Kenney was at this time thirty-two. His farce "Turn Him Out" had just been produced, and his "Love, Law and Physic," which gave Liston the admirable part of Lubin Log, was being written. We shall meet the Kenneys again in 1822.

"May 9th, 1812:—A call on C. Lamb; found Miss Lamb

with him, to my great satisfaction. I chatted a short time. He is of opinion that any attempt to bring Wordsworth [who was then in London] and Coleridge together must prove ineffectual. Perhaps he thinks it mischievous. He thinks W. cold. It may be so: healthful coolness is preferable to the heat of disease. He thinks W.'s arrival in London a most unhappy thing for C. who apprehends his presence at Sir G. Beaumont's will operate to his disadvantage (in his lectures). . . . Borrowed of L. his 'Mr. H.' which in the evening I read at Mrs. Barbauld's to Mrs. and Miss Aikin and Miss Kinder. They all appeared to enjoy it very much." Sir George Beaumont, the painter, was Wordsworth's friend and a patron of Coleridge. Mrs. Anne Letitia Barbauld, the author of *Hymns in Prose*, was then an old lady of sixty-nine, living at Stoke Newington with her brother, Dr. John Aikin, who had collaborated with her in *Evenings at Home*, and with his family, of whom Lucy Aikin, the writer, is the best known.

The reference to Wordsworth and Coleridge requires some explanation, and I cannot do better than give it in the words of the late Mr. Dykes Campbell. "In October [1810] Basil Montagu, with his wife and her little daughter (Anne Skepper, afterwards Mrs. B. W. Procter), called at Greta Hall on his way south from a tour in Scotland. There was a vacant place in the chaise, and this Coleridge took, the party arriving at Montagu's residence (55 Frith Street, Soho) on the 26th October. Coleridge was to have been a guest there for an indefinite period, but within a few days the visit came to an abrupt and painful end. When the chaise halted at Allen Bank, and Wordsworth learnt that Coleridge was to become an inmate of the Montagu household, he expressed to Montagu, in confidence, a fear that some of Coleridge's ways would prove inconvenient in a well-ordered town establishment. This he did with the kindest motives, and no doubt in the kindest terms, thinking that prevention was better than cure—if Coleridge and Montagu became housemates they would quarrel, which would be a misfortune for both, especially for Coleridge.

"Three days after arrival in London, Montagu informed Coleridge that he had been commissioned by Wordsworth to say to him that certain of his (Coleridge's) habits had made him an intolerable guest at Allen Bank, and that he (Wordsworth) had



‘no hope for him.’ Unfortunately Coleridge believed this monstrous story, and, soon after, he left Montagu’s roof, taking refuge with the Morgans, then living at Hammersmith. He was heart-broken that Wordsworth could have said such things of him, much more that he could have commissioned Montagu to repeat them. But for a long time he said nothing.

“The breach between the two poets remained open until May, 1812, when a reconciliation was effected by the good offices of Crabb Robinson. It turned out, of course, that Wordsworth had neither used the wounding (even coarse) language attributed to him with regard to Coleridge’s personal habits, nor said *anything* in the *spirit* attributed to him; nor commissioned Montagu to repeat to Coleridge anything whatever—very much to the contrary. He confessed to having said (or implied) to Montagu that he had ‘little or no hope’ of Coleridge, and expressed deep regret that he had said anything at all to so indiscreet a man as Montagu. Letters declared to be ‘mutually satisfactory’ were exchanged by the two poets, and the troubled air was stilled; but each was conscious that it was also darkened, and that in their friendship there could never be ‘glad confident morning again.’”

A long letter from Coleridge to Lamb on this subject is printed in Mr. E. H. Coleridge’s edition of Coleridge’s letters—one of the very few letters from Coleridge to Lamb that have been preserved.

“May 11th, 1812:—I went again to Coleridge, where I found the Lambs. I had just heard of what had taken place about an hour and half before, the assassination of Mr. Perceval. This news shocked C. exceedingly. . . . C. L. was apparently affected, but could not help mingling with humour his real concern at the event, for he talked of loving his Regent.

“June 6th, 1812:—The Colliers, Wordsworths and the Lambs joined to tea and supper at A. Robinson’s. . . . C. Lamb was very pleasant and comfortable.” A. Robinson was Anthony Robinson, the Unitarian, a great friend, but no relative, of Crabb Robinson. He was then living in Hatton Garden. Anthony Robinson’s company would some years earlier have meant more to Lamb than at this time, for he had been intimate with Priestley.

On the same day, June 6th, Robinson records sending Lamb a copy of Wordsworth’s “Peter Bell” in manuscript, and being

much disappointed by Lamb's verdict. "He complains of the slowness of the narrative. . . . He says Wordsworth has great thoughts, but has left them out here."

In the month of August in this year Charles Lamb became a landed proprietor. He mentions the circumstances in the essay "My First Play," where, writing of his godfather, Francis Fielde, whom we met in Chapter I., he says, "He is dead—and thus much I thought due to his memory, both for my first orders (little wondrous talismans!—slight keys, and insignificant to outward sight, but opening to me more than Arabian paradises!) and moreover, that by his testamentary beneficence I came into possession of the only landed property which I could ever call my own—situate near the road-way village of pleasant Puckeridge, in Hertfordshire. When I journeyed down to take possession, and planted foot on my own ground, the stately habits of the donor descended upon me, and I strode (shall I confess the vanity?) with larger paces over my allotment of three quarters of an acre, with its commodious mansion in the midst, with the feeling of an English freeholder that all betwixt sky and centre was my own."

Francis Fielde left the property to his wife, who conveyed it to Charles Lamb by indentures of lease and release, dated August 20th and 21st, 1812. It is a cottage and garden situated at West Hill Green, in the parish of Buntingford, in Hertfordshire, about two and a half miles from Puckeridge. Mr. Greg, the present owner, has placed a tablet on the wall of the cottage, stating that Charles Lamb once owned it. The little place can have changed hardly at all since Francis Fielde's godson made the momentous journey to see his first and last freehold. Lamb's tenant was a Mr. Sargus, and when Lamb sold the property in 1815 for fifty pounds (Mr. Fielde had given twenty for it), he remitted the last quarter's rent as a set-off against repairs. Mr. Greg (whose ancestor Lamb called Grig) believes that the name of the cottage, Button Snap, was given to it by Lamb.

This may be so. I have quite lately heard of an old man who claimed to be related to a cousin of Charles Lamb named Eliza Button, and who was the possessor of two scrap-books in each of which Lamb had written an acrostic, one being on the name Button. It occurs to me that the odd title of Lamb's cottage, Button Snap, may have some family connection.

In this year was born Charles Dickens.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

1813

Leigh Hunt in Prison—His Praises of Lamb—Lamb's "Favourite Child"—The "Confessions of a Drunkard"—Lamb and Strong Drink—Crabb Robinson's *Diary* Again.

THE year 1813 is largely a blank. No letter can be ascribed to it with certainty, and Robinson has little to tell. Lamb seems to have published only the "Confessions of a Drunkard," some scraps of "Table Talk" for Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*, and his "Recollections of Christ's Hospital" in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Perhaps the most interesting event of the year in his circle was the production, at Drury Lane, on January 23rd, of Coleridge's tragedy "Remorse," with Lamb's fine prologue "spoken by Mr. Carr." Lamb tells us nothing of the performance, nor does Robinson mention him as being present. The prologue, by the way, was only adapted to suit Coleridge's purpose. It had originally been written as one of the addresses to be spoken at the reopening of Drury Lane after the fire. Lamb, like all the other competing poets, was unsuccessful, but he escaped the attention of the authors of *Rejected Addresses*.

On February 3rd the Hunts were sentenced each to two years' imprisonment in separate gaols. Leigh Hunt, accompanied by Barron Field, drove from the court to the Surrey Gaol in Horsemonger Lane, where he was to remain until February 3rd, 1815. After some weeks he was moved into the infirmary, where he furnished a room (which Lamb declared had no counterpart except in a fairy tale), cultivated a garden, pursued his literary vocations, and had the company of his family. In the *Examiner*, July 18th, 1824, in a series of charming papers called "The Wishing Cap," Hunt, speaking of his visitors during his imprisonment, says: "But what return can I make to the



L.s [Lambs], who came to comfort me in all weathers, hail or sunshine, in day-light or in darkness, even in the dreadful frost and snow of the beginning of 1814? I am always afraid of talking about them, lest my tropical temperament should seem to render me too florid." He mentions these visits also in the rhyming epistle to Lamb which he published in the *Examiner* and afterwards in *Foliage*, 1818:—

O thou, whom old Homer would call, were he living,  
Home-lover, thought-feeder, abundant-joke-giving;  
Whose charity springs from deep-knowledge, nor swerves  
Into mere self-reflections, or scornful reserves;  
In short, who wert made for two centuries ago,  
When Shakespeare drew men, and to write was to know;—

You'll guess why I can't see the snow-covered streets,  
Without thinking of you and your visiting feats,  
When you call to remembrance how you and one more,  
When I wanted it most, used to knock at my door;  
For when the sad winds told us rain would come down,  
Or snow upon snow fairly clogged up the town,  
And dun yellow fogs brooded over its white,  
So that scarcely a being was seen towards night,  
Then, then said the lady yclept near and dear,  
"Now, mind what I tell you—the L[ambs] will be here."

So I poked up the flame, and she got out the tea,  
And down we both sat, as prepared as could be;  
And there, sure as fate, came the knock of you two,  
Then the lanthorn, the laugh, and the "Well, how d'ye do?"

Then your palm tow'rds the fire, and your face turned to me,  
And shawls and great-coats being—where they should be,—  
And due "never saws" being paid to the weather,  
We cherished our knees, and sat sipping together,  
And leaving the world to the fogs and the fighters,  
Discussed the pretensions of all sorts of writers;  
Of Shakespeare's coevals, all spirits divine;  
Of Chapman, whose Homer's a fine rough old wine;  
Of Marvel, wit, patriot, and poet who knew  
How to give, both at once, Charles and Cromwell their due;  
Of Spenser, who wraps you, wherever you are,  
In a bow'r of seclusion beneath a sweet star;  
Of Richardson, too, who afflicts us so long,  
We begin to suspect him of nerves over-strong;  
In short, of all those who give full-measur'd page,  
Not forgetting Sir Thomas, my ancestor sage,  
Who delighted (so happy were all his digestions)  
In puzzling his head with impossible questions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The allusion to Sir Thomas Browne as an ancestor is explained by the fact that Leigh Hunt signed the series of epistles of which this is one, Harry Brown.

It was Leigh Hunt's special gift to find excellence in good men and good books. As a constructive critic he may not have been of the first rank, but as an understanding appreciator, a finger-post to beauty, he has had no superior. He wrote of Lamb in many places and always well. In the *Indicator*, in 1821: "If we were to make a summary of Mr. Lamb's merits as a writer, we should say that there was not a deeper or more charitable observer existing. He has none of the abhorrent self-loves that belong to lesser understandings. He takes little, and grants much. He sees through all the causes or circumstances that modify the human character; and while he likes from sympathy, he dislikes with generosity and sincerity, and differs rather than pretends to be better. If there is anything indeed that looks like affectation in the most sincere and unaffected temper of his writings, it arises partly from the excess of his sympathy with his species, and partly from a wish to make the best of all which they do or suffer; and it leads him into the only inconsistency that we can trace to him. As an admirer for instance of Christianity, and perhaps as a Christian himself in the truest sense of the word, he sympathizes exceedingly with patience and gentleness and the forgiveness of wrongs. This also appears to be his own temper; but then he seems fearful lest this should be construed into a weakness instead of a strength; and so from turning his sympathy to another side of human nature, he palliates some of the most vehement and doubtful passions, and has a good word to say now and then in behalf of revenge itself. The consequence of this exceeding wish to make the best of things as they are (we do not speak politically, but philosophically), is, that his writings tend rather to prepare others for doing good wisely, than to help the progress of the species themselves. It is this sympathy also, which tends to give his criticism a more prominent effect, than his poetry. He seems to think that poetry as well as prose has done enough, when it reconciles men to each other as they are; and that after Shakespeare and others, it is useless to say much on this subject; so that he deals little in the abstractions of fancy and imagination. He desires no better Arcadia than Fleet-street; or at least pretends as much, for fear of not finding it."

Again, in the *London Journal*, in 1835, just after Lamb's death: "Mr. Lamb was a humanist, in the most universal sense

of the term. His imagination was not great, and he also wanted sufficient vigour of impulse to render his poetry as good as his prose; but, as a prose-writer, and within the wide circuit of humanity, no man ever took a more complete range than he. He had felt, thought, and suffered so much, that he literally had intolerance for nothing, and never seemed to have it, but when he supposed the sympathies of men, who might have known better, to be imperfect. He was a wit and an observer of the first order, as far as the world around him was concerned, and society in its existing state; for as to anything theoretical or transcendental, no man ever had less care for it, or less power. To take him out of habit and convention, however tolerant he was to those who could speculate beyond them, was to put him into an exhausted receiver, or to send him naked, shivering, and driven to shatters, through the regions of space and time. *He was only at his ease in the old arms of humanity*; and she loved and comforted him like one of her wisest, though weakest children. His life had experienced great and peculiar sorrows; but he kept up a balance between those and his consolations, by the goodness of his heart, and the ever-willing sociality of his humour; though, now and then, as if he would cram into one moment the spleen of years, he would throw out a startling and morbid subject for reflection, perhaps in no better shape than a pun; for he was a great punster. It was a levity that relieved the gravity of his thoughts, and kept them from falling too heavily earthwards."

It was Leigh Hunt's fate never as a writer to be quite good enough; with Hazlitt on one side and Lamb on the other, there was no actual need for much of his work. But such a sentence as that which I have thrown into italics is sufficient indication that within his limits, on his own ground, he could say exquisite things, full of profound discernment and sympathy. Not until Walter Pater's essay in 1889, from which I quote elsewhere in this work, was Lamb so delicately and tenderly treated again.

Lamb, I think, may have felt that he was in some sort himself to blame for Leigh Hunt's imprisonment, his own verses, "The Triumph of the Whale," although unnoticed officially, having no doubt aggravated the *Examiner's* obnoxiousness among the Prince's friends. Hence, perhaps, a part of his assiduity in visiting the prisoner, for Leigh Hunt was not at that time, if ever, a



very intimate friend, comparable with Coleridge or Manning. A further inducement to seek the Surrey gaol was Thornton Hunt, Leigh Hunt's little four-year-old boy, to whom he addressed the pretty verses "To T. L. H.," which were printed in the *Examiner* for January 1st, 1815. In introducing the poem Hunt referred to the author as one to whom he owed "some of the lightest hours of his captivity," and to the subject of it as "his continual solace."

Guileless traitor, rebel mild,  
Convict unconscious, culprit-child!  
Gates that close with iron roar  
Have been to thee thy nursery door;  
Chains that chink in cheerless cells  
Have been thy rattles and thy bells;  
Walls contrived for giant sin  
Have hemmed thy faultless weakness in. . . .

But the clouds, that overcast  
Thy young morning, may not last.  
Soon shall arrive the rescuing hour,  
That yields thee up to Nature's power.  
Nature, that so late doth greet thee,  
Shall in o'er-flowing measure meet thee.  
She shall recompense with cost  
For every lesson thou hast lost.  
Then wandering up thy sire's lov'd hill,<sup>1</sup>  
Thou shalt take thy airy fill  
Of health and pastime. *Birds shall sing*  
*For thy delight each May morning. . . .*

So shall be thy days beguil'd,  
THORNTON HUNT, my favourite child.

Crabb Robinson's first entry for 1813 runs thus: "Jan. 14th:—Called at Lamb's, where I found the Hazlitts, &c., and chatted pleasantly enough with them.

"April 29th, 1813. Thursday:—I spent the evening, which I have not done for a long time before, at C. Lamb's; at whist as usual. Chat with Hazlitt, who finds himself made comfortable by a situation which furnishes him with the necessaries of life, keeps his best faculties not employed but awake, and I do not think it is much to be feared that his faculties will therefore decline; he has a most powerful intellect and needs only encouragement to manifest this to the world by a work which could not be overlooked." Hazlitt's appointment was that of parlia-

<sup>1</sup> Hampstead.

mentary reporter to the *Chronicle*, in acquiring which Lamb seems to have been instrumental, as we know from a letter to John Dyer Collier on the subject. Hazlitt did not long retain the post, disagreeing with James Perry, the editor, in the autumn of the following year. Robinson describes the quarrel.

The next entry requires serious attention. "April 29th, 1813:—Read lately C. Lamb's *Confessions of a Drunkard*, a very striking composition and calculated to do good generally, though it will hardly be thought so near a correct representation of a fact as it really is. It is sometimes painfully eloquent."

The essay—which was printed in the *Philanthropist*, No. IX., in 1813, reprinted in Basil Montagu's *Some Enquiries into the Effects of Fermented Liquors*, in 1814; again in the *London Magazine* for August, 1822; and lastly in the second edition of the *Last Essays of Elia*, after Lamb's death—is a remarkable document, and whether imaginary or true, it must always have painful associations. Robinson's comment upon it makes the consideration of the subject necessary; but it would be well first to have a portion of the "Confessions" before us. I quote, not from the *Philanthropist*, where editorial changes seem to have been imposed, but from the essay as it was reprinted by Lamb's own wish in the *London Magazine* in 1822.

"Begin a reformation, and custom will make it easy. But what if the beginning be dreadful, the first steps not like climbing a mountain but going through fire? what if the whole system must undergo a change violent as that which we conceive of the mutation of form in some insects? what if a process comparable to flaying alive be to be gone through? is the weakness that sinks under such struggles to be confounded with the pertinacity which clings to other vices, which have induced no constitutional necessity, no engagement of the whole victim, body and soul?"

"I have known one in that state, when he has tried to abstain but for one evening,—though the poisonous potion had long ceased to bring back its first enchantments, though he was sure it would rather deepen his gloom than brighten it,—in the violence of the struggle, and the necessity he has felt of getting rid of the present sensation at any rate, I have known him to scream out, to cry aloud, for the anguish and pain of the strife within him.

“Why should I hesitate to declare, that the man of whom I speak is myself? I have no puling apology to make to mankind. I see them all in one way or another deviating from the pure reason. It is to my own nature alone I am accountable for the woe that I have brought upon it.

“I believe that there are constitutions, robust heads and iron insides, whom scarce any excesses can hurt; whom brandy (I have seen them drink it like wine), at all events whom wine, taken in ever so plentiful measure, can do no worse injury to than just to muddle their faculties, perhaps never very pellucid. On them this discourse is wasted. They would but laugh at a weak brother, who, trying his strength with them, and coming off foiled from the contest, would fain persuade them that such agonistic exercises are dangerous. It is to a very different description of persons I speak. It is to the weak, the nervous; to those who feel the want of some artificial aid to raise their spirits in society to what is no more than the ordinary pitch of all around them without it. This is the secret of our drinking. Such must fly the convivial board in the first instance, if they do not mean to sell themselves for term of life.

“Twelve years ago I had completed my six and twentieth year. I had lived from the period of leaving school to that time pretty much in solitude. My companions were chiefly books, or at most one or two living ones of my own book-loving and sober stamp. I rose early, went to bed betimes, and the faculties which God had given me, I have reason to think, did not rust in me unused.

“About that time I fell in with some companions of a different order. They were men of boisterous spirits, sitters up a-nights, disputants, drunken; yet seemed to have something noble about them. We dealt about the wit, or what passes for it after midnight, jovially. Of the quality called fancy I certainly possessed a larger share than my companions. Encouraged by their applause, I set up for a profest joker! I, who of all men am least fitted for such an occupation, having, in addition to the greatest difficulty which I experience at all times of finding words to express my meaning, a natural nervous impediment in my speech!

“Reader, if you are gifted with nerves like mine, aspire to any character but that of a wit. When you find a tickling relish upon your tongue disposing you to that sort of conversation,



especially if you find a preternatural flow of ideas setting in upon you at the sight of a bottle and fresh glasses, avoid giving way to it as you would fly your greatest destruction. If you cannot crush the power of fancy, or that within you which you mistake for such, divert it, give it some other play. Write an essay, pen a character or description,—but not as I do now, with tears trickling down your cheeks.

“To be an object of compassion to friends, of derision to foes ; to be suspected by strangers, stared at by fools ; to be esteemed dull when you cannot be witty, to be applauded for witty when you know that you have been dull ; to be called upon for the extemporaneous exercise of that faculty which no premeditation can give ; to be spurred on to efforts which end in contempt ; to be set on to provoke mirth which procures the procurer hatred ; to give pleasure and be paid with squinting malice ; to swallow draughts of life-destroying wine which are to be distilled into airy breath to tickle vain auditors ; to mortgage miserable morrows for nights of madness ; to waste whole seas of time upon those who pay it back in little inconsiderable drops of grudging applause,—are the wages of buffoonery and death.

“Time, which has a sure stroke at dissolving all connexions which have no solider fastening than this liquid cement, more kind to me than my own taste or penetration, at length opened my eyes to the supposed qualities of my first friends. No trace of them is left but in the vices which they introduced, and the habits they infixed. In them my friends survive still, and exercise ample retribution for any supposed infidelity that I may have been guilty of towards them.

“My next more immediate companions were and are persons of such intrinsic and felt worth, that though accidentally their acquaintance has proved pernicious to me, I do not know that if the thing were to do over again, I should have the courage to eschew the mischief at the price of forfeiting the benefit. I came to them reeking from the steams of my late over-heated notions of companionship ; and the slightest fuel which they unconsciously afforded, was sufficient to feed my old fires into a propensity.

“They were no drinkers, but, one from professional habits, and another from a custom derived from his father, smoked tobacco. The devil could not have devised a more subtle trap to re-take a backsliding penitent. The transition, from gulping down draughts

of liquid fire to puffing out innocuous blasts of dry smoke, was so like cheating him. But he is too hard for us when we hope to commute. He beats us at barter; and when we think to set off a new failing against an old infirmity, 'tis odds but he puts the trick upon us of two for one. That (comparatively) white devil of tobacco brought with him in the end seven worse than himself. . . .

“I should repel my readers, from a mere incapacity of believing me, were I to tell them what tobacco has been to me, the drudging service which I have paid, the slavery which I have vowed to it. How, when I have resolved to quit it, a feeling as of ingratitude has started up; how it has put on personal claims and made the demands of a friend upon me. How the reading of it casually in a book, as where Adams takes his whiff in the chimney-corner of some inn in Joseph Andrews, or Piscator in the Complete Angler breaks his fast upon a morning pipe in that delicate room *Piscatoribus Sacrum*, has in a moment broken down the resistance of weeks. How a pipe was ever in my midnight path before me, till the vision forced me to realize it,—how then its ascending vapours curled, its fragrance lulled, and the thousand delicious ministerings conversant about it, employing every faculty, extracted the sense of pain. How from illuminating it came to darken, from a quick solace it turned to a negative relief, thence to a restlessness and dissatisfaction, thence to a positive misery. How, even now, when the whole secret stands confessed in all its dreadful truth before me, I feel myself linked to it beyond the power of revocation. Bone of my bone—— . . .

“The waters have gone over me. But out of the black depths, could I be heard, I would cry out to all those who have but set a foot in the perilous flood. Could the youth, to whom the flavor of his first wine is delicious as the opening scenes of life, or the entering upon some newly discovered paradise, look into my desolation, and be made to understand what a dreary thing it is when a man shall feel himself going down a precipice with open eyes and a passive will,—to see his destruction, and have no power to stop it, and yet to feel it all the way emanating from himself; to perceive all goodness emptied out of him, and yet not to be able to forget a time when it was otherwise; to bear about the piteous spectacle of his own self-ruins:—could he see my fevered eye, feverish with last night's drinking, and feverishly looking for

this night's repetition of the folly ; could he feel the body of the death out of which I cry hourly with feebler and feebler outcry to be delivered,—it were enough to make him dash the sparkling beverage to the earth in all the pride of its mantling temptation ; to make him clasp his teeth,

and not undo 'em  
To suffer WET DAMNATION to run through 'em. . . .

"*Recovering!*—O if a wish could transport me back to those days of youth, when a draught from the next clear spring could slake any heats which summer suns and youthful exercise had power to stir up in the blood, how gladly would I return to thee, pure element, the drink of children, and of child-like holy hermit. In my dreams I can sometimes fancy thy cool refreshment purling over my burning tongue. But my waking stomach rejects it. That which refreshes innocence, only makes me sick and faint. . . .

"Behold me then, in the robust period of life, reduced to imbecility and decay. Hear me count my gains, and the profits which I have derived from the midnight cup.

"Twelve years ago I was possessed of a healthy frame of mind and body. I was never strong, but I think my constitution (for a weak one) was as happily exempt from the tendency to any malady as it was possible to be. I scarce knew what it was to ail any thing. Now, except when I am losing myself in a sea of drink, I am never free from those uneasy sensations in head and stomach, which are so much worse to bear than any definite pains or aches.

"At that time I was seldom in bed after six in the morning, summer and winter. I awoke refreshed, and seldom without some merry thoughts in my head, or some piece of a song to welcome the new-born day. Now, the first feeling which besets me, after stretching out the hours of recumbence to their last possible extent, is a forecast of the wearisome day that lies before me, with a secret wish that I could have lain on still, or never awaked.

"Life itself, my waking life, has much of the confusion, the trouble, and obscure perplexity, of an ill dream. In the daytime I stumble upon dark mountains. . . ."

I have omitted some portions, but the most poignant passages are there. The reason for reprinting the "Confessions" in 1822 was twofold : Lamb was in France and unable to supply a new



essay, and a writer in the *Quarterly* had gone out of his way, in the number for April, 1822, to pronounce the "Confessions" (as printed in Montagu's book) genuine. In the *London Magazine* the essay was therefore accompanied by a note from Lamb's pen. "We have been induced, in the first instance, to re-print a Thing, which he [Elia] put forth in a friend's volume some years since, entitled the Confessions of a Drunkard, seeing that Messieurs the Quarterly Reviewers have chosen to embellish their last dry pages with fruitful quotations therefrom; adding, from their peculiar brains, the gratuitous affirmation, that they have reason to believe that the describer (in his delineations of a drunkard forsooth!) partly sate for his own picture. The truth is, that our friend had been reading among the Essays of a contemporary, who has perversely been confounded with him,<sup>1</sup> a paper in which *Edax* (or the *Great Eater*) humorously complaineth of an inordinate appetite; and it struck him, that a better paper—of deeper interest, and wider usefulness—might be made out of the imagined experiences of a *Great Drinker*. Accordingly he set to work, and with that mock fervor, and counterfeit earnestness, with which he is too apt to over-realise his descriptions, has given us—a frightful picture indeed—but no more resembling the man *Elia*, than the fictitious *Edax* may be supposed to identify itself with Mr. L., its author. It is indeed a compound extracted out of his long observations of the effects of drinking upon all the world about him; and this accumulated mass of misery he hath centered (as the custom is with judicious essayists) in a single figure. We deny not that a portion of his own experiences may have passed into the picture, (as who, that is not a washy fellow, but must at some times have felt the after-operation of a too generous cup?)—but then how heightened! how exaggerated!—how little within the sense of the Review, where a part, in their slanderous usage, must be understood to stand for the whole!—but it is useless to expostulate with this Quarterly slime, brood of Nilus, watery heads with hearts of jelly, spawned under the sign of Aquarius, incapable of Bacchus, and therefore cold, washy, spiteful, bloodless.—Elia shall string them up one day, and show their colours—or rather how colourless and vapid the whole fry—when he putteth forth his long promised, but unaccountably hitherto delayed, Confessions of a Water-drinker."

<sup>1</sup> Referring to his own *Works*, 1818.

This—but for Robinson's remark—would be a sufficient answer ; and indeed it may be said at once that Robinson probably was not a good judge of drunkards. Being a man of little imagination and exceptional decorum and self-control—his only excesses were in the direction of intolerance of the unrespectable—he may be considered a prejudiced witness to all intemperateness. Living close by, in the Temple, he saw much of Lamb, especially when Mary Lamb was away, and when therefore, ill-starred, lonely and depressed, Lamb was peculiarly in need of such excitement as a little alcohol too easily gave him, or of such an anodyne as could be found in too much. Deducing, with the cold uncharitableness of the logical Puritan, a regular habit from such irregularities, Robinson wrote as he did.—That I believe to be a true statement of this part of the case.

At the same time it is conceivable that Lamb may have been in a hopeless state of mind at this time. It may be that in the years 1812 and 1813 he had given way more frequently than heretofore. He was then at a difficult age, in the middle thirties, when a man has lost the ardour of youth and has not yet come to the serenity of age ; a period when the question "Am I a failure?" is asked very searchingly, and low spirits are too frequent. Lamb's finest work was yet to come ; but he could not know this, and he may have felt that for one who had begun as ambitiously as he, with a novel and a tragedy, there ought to be more reputation at thirty-seven than could come from hack-work for Godwin and contributions to an unsuccessful periodical like the *Reflector*. This is merely a theory ; but some such sense of failure may have stifled his energies, disinclined him to write letters, and, particularly when his sister was ill—those seasons finding him naturally at his weakest and loneliest—have encouraged him to take refuge more and more in strong drink.

In a letter to Wordsworth in 1814, a year later, concerning the review of the *Excursion*, Lamb says : "I write with great difficulty, and can scarce command my own resolution to sit at writing an hour together. I am a poor creature, but I am leaving off gin." Wordsworth least of all of his friends would Lamb wish to deceive into the belief that he was too much in the power of alcohol ; and we may therefore accept what he says as true. Thus accepting it, we may, I think, reasonably consider that the truth lay between the "Confessions" of 1813 and

Elia's note of 1822: that is to say, that Lamb was more in earnest in 1813 than he admitted in 1822, or that he affected more light-heartedness in 1822 than he had known in reality in 1813. My own belief is that he was in no sense the slave that he depicts, but that he had often, in less buoyant moods, allowed himself to speculate on the possibility of his passing into such bondage, and invented as terrible a realisation of these imaginative flights as he was able.

We have, I think, a more prosaic reason for the untruth of the "Confessions" in the circumstance that Lamb was in a public office where drunkenness was severely punished (witness the case of Tommy Bye, mentioned in a later chapter); and to write himself down a drunkard would be too foolish. He was never foolish in print. We may feel very certain that if the "Confessions" had been based upon anything more actual than an acute apprehension of the temptations and perils of drink, Lamb would never have retired from the East India House with a pension of £450 a year.

Admitting a tendency to vinous exaltation, we have to remember that Lamb lived at a time when public opinion was not what it is now, and when occasionally to finish a social evening beneath the table involved no stigma. And we must remember, too, what Lamb says in the "Confessions," of the effect of alcohol as a solvent of his stammering speech. Whatever injury may have been done to Respectability by Lamb's excesses was so much gain to Wit and Good Humour. But I am ashamed to touch the rôle of apologist.

It comes to this, that he must be a man very secure in his own righteousness who would pass condemnatory judgment upon Charles Lamb's only weakness. One of Talfourd's finest rhetorical efforts bears upon this question. "Will any one, acquainted with these secret passages of Lamb's history, wonder that, with a strong physical inclination for the stimulus and support of strong drinks—which man is framed moderately to rejoice in—he should snatch some wild pleasure 'between the acts' (as he called them) 'of his distressful drama,' and that, still more, during the loneliness of the solitude created by his sister's absences, he should obtain the solace of an hour's feverish dream? That, notwithstanding that frailty, he performed the duties of his hard lot with exemplary steadiness and discretion is



indeed wonderful—especially when it is recollected that he had himself been visited, when in the dawn of manhood, with his sister's malady, the seeds of which were doubtless in his frame. While that natural predisposition may explain an occasional flightiness of expression on serious matters, fruit of some wayward fancy, which flitted through his brain, without disturbing his constant reason or reaching his heart, and some little extravagances of fitful mirth, how does it heighten the moral courage by which the disease was controlled and the severest duties performed! Never surely was there a more striking example of the power of a virtuous, rather say, of a pious, wish to conquer the fiery suggestions of latent insanity than that presented by Lamb's history. Nervous, tremulous, as he seemed—so slight of frame that he looked only fit for the most placid fortune—when the dismal emergencies which chequered his life arose, he acted with as much promptitude and vigour as if he had never penned a stanza nor taken a glass too much, or was strung with herculean sinews."

If, however, the "Confessions" were taken seriously by many readers, Lamb, it must be admitted, had only himself to thank. They do not savour of a joke, and they contain several statements of fact. Twelve years from 1813 Lamb had been twenty-six; he was known to have an impediment in his speech; to have been an excessive smoker. The first set of friends that he mentions correspond, as I have shown, to Fenwick and Fell ("my drunken companions," as he called them to Manning); the second set to Burney, Rickman and the whist players.

The theory has been developed by Mr. Thomas Hutchinson, a student of Lamb from whom I hesitate to differ, that the essay was a deliberate jest designed to take in the editors of the *Philanthropist*, William Allen and James Mill, two determined Benthamites. But however one tries, the essay cannot be made to read like a work of humour.

The "Confessions of a Drunkard" were again published in 1854 as a temperance, or rather teetotal, tract, professedly being the true story of Charles Lamb's own tragedy. The following letter in the *Examiner* for April 29th, 1854, uttered a necessary protest:—

"SIR,—One of the noblest of the Essays of Elia has been re-published as a tract by Tweedie, with this perverted title, 'The Confessions of Charles Lamb.' This is, indeed, bringing down the bird of Heaven with a feather from his

own wing. 'The Confessions of a Drunkard' are, like all the Essays of Elia, written in the *first person*, and it would be equally unjust to print the words put into the mouth of Malcolm (in act 4th, scene 3rd of Macbeth) as the 'Confessions of William Shakespeare.' Is it because the life of Charles Lamb was a pattern of charity that those who are destitute of this virtue have singled him out as a warning? When *he* was told that a young lady of his acquaintance had married an innkeeper (the inference being that she had thereby lost caste), he replied with his sunniest smile, 'Has she, indeed; then I'll always send there for my beer.' Was there no 'self-denial' in his long life of devotedness to his insane sister? It is only among those who have never felt the purifying influences of his life and writings that he needs a vindication. But his memory is too precious to be held up to the contempt of *any* of his countrymen. I am, sir, yours truly,

"VINDICATOR."

The tract was withdrawn, but, lest the weakling should be deprived of all literary object lessons, the sad case of Hartley Coleridge was substituted.

## CHAPTER XXIX

1814

A Lean Year—An Engagement with the *Champion*—An Evening with the Aikins—George Dawe becomes an R.A.—A Walk to Enfield—Lamb and Music—The Review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*—Lamb and Gifford—A Discovery at No. 4 Inner Temple Lane—Mary Lamb's Article on Women.

FOUR extracts from Crabb Robinson's *Diary* complete the year 1813.

"June 11th, Friday, 1813 :—When I came home C. Lamb was here. His sister had been taken ill and he had brought her from Windsor. He came with a note from Miss Hayes I was to answer.

"November 10th, Wednesday, 1813 :—Took tea with Lamb. I also called and supped with Godwin. The Lambs were there. . . . Kenney was there.

"November 12th, 1813 :—In the evening a party at Anthony Robinson's. The Lambs were there, and Charles seemed to enjoy himself. We played cards, and at the close of the evening he dryly said to Mrs. Robinson, 'I have enjoyed the evening much, which I do not often do at people's houses.'

"December 30th, 1813 :—After dinner a rubber at Lamb's; then went with Lamb and Burney to Rickman's; Hazlitt there. Cards, as usual, were our amusement. Lamb was in a pleasant mood. Rickman spoke of Chatterton's forgeries. I saw one manuscript in which he had seventeen kinds of e's all written differently. 'Oh,' said Lamb, 'that must have been modern—written by one of "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease."'"<sup>1</sup>

In 1814 Lamb, so far as we know, published only the essay on "The Melancholy of Tailors," and wrote few letters. Towards the end of the year, however, as we shall see, he toiled over a review of Wordsworth's *Excursion* for the *Quarterly*, a task

<sup>1</sup> Pope's *Satires*, v., 108.



which caused his correspondence to reawaken. Crabb Robinson tells us that it was in 1814 that Lamb's parties began to be held once a month instead of once a week—a change induced probably by the health of Mary Lamb, who may have suffered under the weekly excitement.

Early in the year is a note to John Scott, editor of the *Champion*, who afterwards, as editor of the *London Magazine*, was to have a profound influence on Lamb's career. Scott we shall meet in 1820; in 1814 he seems to have asked Lamb for contributions to the *Champion*, a weekly paper of the *Examiner* type. Lamb promised some, but the only piece absolutely identifiable is the essay on "The Melancholy of Tailors," although I suspect his hand in some mock letters and in the choice of extracts from old writers. He cancelled the engagement at the end of the year.

Robinson's *Diary* yields some interesting entries:—

"Feb. 15th, 1814:—De Quincey came by appointment and we went together to Lamb, with whom we drank tea and stayed till 9. . . . The evening was rather dull. . . ." De Quincey tells us nothing of this visit; but, as we shall see, he describes his chagrin at Lamb's insensibility in the midst of national enthusiasm later in the year, on the declaration of peace, when Blucher was in England.

"May 15th, 1814:—At the Colliers'. Lamb and his sister this evening expressed great kindness towards me, and it gave me great pleasure. They indeed belong to the very best of persons. Their moral qualities are as distinguished as their intellectual."

Robinson had for some time wished to bring the Lambs and the Aikins together. On May 28th he succeeded. His *Diary* records the meeting. "May 28th, 1814:—After dinner with the Colliers accompanied Charles and Miss Lamb to Dr. Aikin's. The visit was highly agreeable to all parties. Lamb was quite on his good behaviour. He kept within bounds and yet was very pleasant. He related a droll history of a clerk in the India House suspected of living on human flesh, and he introduced the whimsical conceit that among cannibals a man who would not join in the common diet would be called a Misanthropist.<sup>1</sup> Lamb

<sup>1</sup> The joke about cannibalism seems to have been very near Lamb's heart. He accuses Simonds of it in a letter to Rickman, and one of his schoolfellows is laid under the same suspicion in the *Elia* essay on Christ's Hospital.

abused Gray's poetry, but the Aikins did not take up the assertion, and the Doctor's favourite opinion of the unimprovability of mankind met with no opposition from the L's. Miss A. admired both the wit and fine face of Lamb, and he was pleased with the family, particularly the old lady. I believe they will renew their visit. . . ."

It was in the spring of this year that George Dawe was made a Royal Academician. In May, just before the Allied Sovereigns came to London on a triumphant visit, Lamb called on the great painter. "His pleasant housekeeper seemed embarrassed; owned that her master was alone. But could he be spoken with? With some importunity I prevailed upon her to usher me up into his painting-room. It was in Newman-street. At his easel stood D., with an immense spread of canvas before him, and by his side a—live Goose. I enquired into this extraordinary combination. Under the rose he informed me, that he had undertaken to paint a transparency for Vauxhall, against an expected visit of the Allied Sovereigns to that place. I smiled at an engagement so derogatory to his new-born honours; but a contempt of small gains was never one of D.'s foibles. My eyes beheld crude forms of warriors, kings, rising under his brush upon this interminable stretch of cloth. The Wolga, the Don, and the Nieper, were there, or their representative River Gods; and Father Thames clubbed urns with the Vistula. Glory with her dazzling Eagle was not absent, nor Fame, nor Victory. The shade of Rubens might have evoked the mighty allegories. But what was the Goose? He was evidently *sitting* for a something.

"D. at last informed me, that having fixed upon a group of rivers, he could not introduce the Royal Thames without his *swans*. That he had enquired the price of a live swan, and it being more than he was prepared to give for it, he had bargained with the poulterer for the *next thing to it*; adding significantly, that it would do to roast, after it had served its turn to paint swans by. *Reader, this is a true story.*"

Crabb Robinson has a very interesting entry under Sunday, July 3rd: "A day of great pleasure. Charles Lamb and I walked to Enfield by Southgate, after an early breakfast in his chambers. We were most hospitably received by Anthony Robinson and his wife. After tea, Lamb and I returned. The whole day most delightfully fine, and the scenery very agreeable.

Lamb cared for the walk more than the scenery, for the enjoyment of which he seems to have no great susceptibility. His great delight, even in preference to a country walk, is a stroll in London. The shops and the busy streets, such as Thames Street, Bankside, &c., are his great favourites. He, for the same reason, has no relish for landscape painting. But his relish for historic painting is exquisite. Lamb's peculiarities are very interesting. We had not much conversation. He hummed tunes, I repeated Wordsworth's 'Daffodils,' of which I am become very fond. Lamb can relish the Thieves in the last stage of avarice, but which is beyond me.<sup>1</sup> At the same time he censures Wordsworth's narrative. Lamb praised T. Warton's 'Sonnet in Dugdale' as of first-rate excellence. It is a good thought, but I find nothing exquisite in it.<sup>2</sup> He praised Prior's courtly poems—his 'Down Hall'—his fine application of the names of Marlborough, as not so ill sounding as to be offensive to the ears of Boileau, his dedication to Lord Halifax, &c.

"Lamb and A. R[obinson] agreed together and seemed to enjoy the afternoon. Lamb expressed himself strongly against the keeping of a mistress, as more degrading and immoral than the most promiscuous intercourse, in which A. R. agreed. The holding a woman at once so near and yet at so great a distance is the most scandalous injustice and greatest wickedness."

Robinson's statement that Lamb hummed tunes is interesting when we recollect that in the *Elia* essay "On Ears" he denies the possession of any musical sense. We know, however, from the letter on page 286, that Braham's singing could draw him to the

<sup>1</sup> "The Two Thieves; or, The Last Stage of Avarice."

<sup>2</sup> This is Warton's Sonnet:—

WRITTEN IN A BLANK LEAF OF DUGDALE'S MONASTICON

DEEM not, devoid of elegance, the sage,  
By fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd,  
Of painful pedantry the poring child;  
Who turns, of these proud tomes, th' historic page,  
Now sunk by time, and Henry's fiercer rage.  
Think'st thou the warbling Muses never smil'd  
On his lone hours? Ingenuous views engage  
His thoughts, on themes, unclassic falsely styl'd,  
Intent. While cloister'd Piety displays  
Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores  
New manners, and the pomp of elder days,  
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.  
Nor rough, nor barren, are the winding ways  
Of hoar Antiquity, but strown with flowers.



theatre every night, and Barron Field, in some biographical notes written in 1835, says that he loved certain beautiful airs, notably Kent's "O that I had Wings like a Dove," and Handel's "From Mighty Kings."

In a letter to Wordsworth on August 9th, 1814, Lamb refers to the excited condition of London upon the declaration of Peace between England and France: "Save for a late excursion to Harrow and a day or two on the banks of the Thames this Summer, rural images were fast fading from my mind; and by the wise provision of the Regent all that was countryfy'd in the Parks is all but obliterated. The very colour of green is vanishd; the whole surface of Hyde Park is dry crumbling sand (*Arabia Arenosa*), not a vestige or hint of grass ever having grown there. Booths and drinking-places go all round it for a mile and half, I am confident—I might say two miles in circuit."

We have heard so much of Lamb from Robinson, that a word or so of Robinson from Lamb is due. We find it in a letter to Coleridge, now in the west with the Morgans, in August, in reply to a request to Lamb to borrow certain of Crabb's books. Lamb had sent the letter to Robinson, then on circuit. "Crab [he says] might have answered by this time: his juices take a long time supplying, but they'll run at last—I know they will,—pure golden pippin. . . . A fearful rumour has since reached me that the Crab is on the eve of setting out for France. If he is in England, your letter will reach him, and I flatter myself a touch of the persuasive of my own, which accompanies it, will not be thrown away; if it be, he is a Sloe, and no true-hearted crab, and there's an end."

We now come to Lamb's unfortunate and only appearance as a critic in the *Quarterly Review*. Wordsworth, wishing to have the *Excursion* reviewed by Lamb, suggested the project to Southey, who put the matter before Gifford, the editor, for whom, as we have seen, Lamb very naturally had no love. Gifford acquiesced, and with many misgivings Lamb began his task—delayed a little by the detention of the book by Hazlitt, who reviewed it from this copy in the *Examiner*, not favourably. (Hazlitt and Lamb having had some little quarrel, Hazlitt borrowed the *Excursion* through Martin Burney.)

That Lamb admired—and even revered—the poem we know from his letter to Wordsworth of August 9th, 1814, where

he says, "It is the noblest conversational poem I ever read. A day in heaven;" adding, at the end of his criticism, this pleasant and very characteristic passage: "There is a deal of noble matter about mountain scenery, yet not so much as to overpower and discountenance a poor Londoner or South country man entirely, though Mary seems to have felt it occasionally a little too powerfully, for it was her remark during reading it that by your system it was doubtful whether a Liver in Towns had a Soul to be Saved. She almost trembled for that invisible part of us in her."

After infinite difficulty Lamb at last finished and despatched his review, which was printed in the *Quarterly* for October, 1814, a number not issued, however, until almost the end of the year. When Lamb saw it, and found that Gifford had made alterations with the utmost freedom, his mortification was profound. "Whatever inadequateness it had to its subject," he assures Wordsworth, "it was in point of composition the prettiest piece of prose I ever writ: and so my sister (to whom alone I read the MS.) said. That charm, if it had any, is all gone: more than a third of the substance is cut away and that not all from one place, but *passim*, so as to make utter nonsense. Every warm expression is changed for a nasty cold one." It is unfortunate that the original manuscript of the article has not been preserved.

On November 2nd, in a charming letter to Barbara Betham, Matilda Betham's small sister, Mary Lamb tells of a great discovery at No. 4 Inner Temple Lane: "Soon after you left us we were distressed by the cries of a cat, which seemed to proceed from the garrets adjoining to ours, and only separated from ours by a locked door on the farther side of my brother's bedroom, which you know was the little room at the top of the kitchen stairs. We had the lock forced and let poor puss out from behind a panel of the wainscot, and she lived with us from that time, for we were in gratitude bound to keep her, as she had introduced us to four untenanted, unowned rooms, and by degrees we have taken possession of these unclaimed apartments, first putting up lines to dry our clothes, then moving my brother's bed into one of these, more commodious than his own room. And last winter, my brother being unable to pursue a work he had begun, owing to the kind interruptions of friends who were more at leisure than himself, I persuaded him that he might write at his ease in one of these rooms, as he could not then hear the door knock, or hear

himself denied to be at home, which was sure to make him call out and convict the poor maid in a fib. Here, I said, he might be almost really not at home. So I put in an old grate, and made him a fire in the largest of these garrets, and carried in one table and one chair, and bid him write away, and consider himself as much alone as if he were in a new lodging in the midst of Salisbury Plain, or any other wide, unfrequented place where he could expect few visitors to break in upon his solitude. I left him quite delighted with his new acquisition, but in a few hours he came down again with a sadly dismal face. He could do nothing, he said, with those bare whitewashed walls before his eyes. He could not write in that dull unfurnished prison.

“The next day, before he came home from his office, I had gathered up various bits of old carpeting to cover the floor; and, to a little break the blank look of the bare walls, I hung up a few old prints that used to ornament the kitchen; and after dinner, with great boast of what improvement I had made, I took Charles once more into his new study. A week of busy labours followed, in which I think you would not have disliked to have been our assistant. My brother and I almost covered the walls with prints, for which purpose he cut out every print from every book in his old library, coming in every now and then to ask my leave to strip a fresh poor author—which he might not do, you know, without my permission, as I am elder sister. There was such pasting, such consultation where their portraits, and where the series of pictures from Ovid, Milton, and Shakespear would show to most advantage, and in what obscure corner authors of humbler note might be allowed to tell their stories. All the books gave up their stores but one, a translation from Ariosto, a delicious set of four and twenty prints, and for which I had marked out a conspicuous place; when lo! we found at the moment the scissars were going to work, that a part of the poem was printed at the back of every picture. What a cruel disappointment! To conclude this long story about nothing, the poor despised garret is now called the print room, and is become our most favorite sitting room.”

Under the date December 11th, 1814, Crabb Robinson has this: “After reading at home from eight to ten I called on Miss Lamb, and chatted with her, her brother being in bed, from 10 to 11. She was not unwell, but she had undergone great fatigue



from writing an article about needlework for the new *Ladies' British Magazine*. She spoke of writing as a most painful occupation, which only necessity could make her attempt. She has been learning Latin merely to assist her in acquiring a correct style. Yet, while she speaks of inability to write, what grace and talent has she not manifested in *Mrs. Leicester's School, &c.*" The real title of the periodical was the *British Lady's Magazine*. The article "On Needlework" (which is printed in Vol. I. of my edition of the Lambs' works) was published in the number for April, 1815. It abounds in Mary Lamb's shrewd, practical common sense, with perhaps a note of irony now and then, as at the end of the following passage: "In how many ways is a good woman employed, in thought or action, through the day, in order that her *good man* may be enabled to feel his leisure hours *real substantial holyday*, and perfect respite from the cares of business! Not the least part to be done to accomplish this end is to fit herself to become a conversational companion; that is to say, she has to study and understand the subjects on which he loves to talk. This part of our duty, if strictly performed, will be found by far our hardest part. The disadvantages we labour under from an education differing from a manly one make the hours in which we *sit and do nothing* in men's company too often any thing but a relaxation; although, as to pleasure and instruction, time so passed may be esteemed more or less delightful.

"To make a man's home so desirable a place as to preclude his having a wish to pass his leisure hours at any fireside in preference to his own, I should humbly take to be the sum and substance of woman's domestic ambition. I would appeal to our *British ladies*, who are generally allowed to be the most jealous and successful of all women in the pursuit of this object,—I would appeal to them who have been most successful in the performance of this laudable service, in behalf of father, son, husband, or brother, whether an anxious desire to perform this duty well is not attended with enough of *mental* exertion, at least, to incline them to the opinion that women may be more properly ranked among the contributors to, than the partakers of, the undisturbed relaxation of man."

In December Mary Lamb was taken ill again. Says Robinson, on the 20th: "Late in the evening Lamb called, to sit with me

while he smoked his pipe." (Tobacco not abandoned yet!) "I had called on him late last night and he seemed absurdly grateful for the visit. He wanted society, being alone. I abstained from inquiring after his sister and trust he will appreciate the motive." In the last letter of the year, on December 28th, to Wordsworth, Lamb says: "Mary keeps pretty bad."

## CHAPTER XXX

1815-1816

Enter Thomas Noon Talfourd—India House Bondage—The Frugal Wordsworth—Crabb Robinson's *Diary*—The Wordsworths in London—A Visit to Mackery End—Barron Field—The Cambridge Adventures—Mary Lamb Again Ill—Nonsense to Manning—A Happy 1816—Coleridge settles at Highgate—A Month at Calne, in Wiltshire—Hazlitt's Article on Coleridge—Rustication at Dalston.

AT the beginning of 1815 Lamb and his biographer, Thomas Noon Talfourd, met for the first time. Talfourd, aged twenty, a law student under the tuition of Joseph Chitty, the special pleader, in rooms on the next staircase to Lamb's in Inner Temple Lane, was invited to meet Lamb, whom he had long admired and even revered, at dinner at the house of Mr. William Evans. (Evans, who held office in the East India House, and was the proprietor of the *Pamphleteer*, for which Talfourd, who began his intellectual life very early, had written, was the friend for whom two years later Joseph painted Lamb's portrait, which is reproduced opposite page 410.) I quote Talfourd's story: "My duties at the office did not allow me to avail myself of this invitation to dinner, but I went up at ten o'clock, through a deep snow, palpably congealing into ice, and was amply repaid when I reached the hospitable abode of my friend. There was Lamb, preparing to depart, but he stayed half an hour in kindness to me, and then accompanied me to our common home—the Temple.

"Methinks I see him before me now, as he appeared then, and as he continued, with scarcely any perceptible alteration to me, during the twenty years of intimacy which followed, and were closed by his death. A light frame, so fragile that it seemed as if a breath would overthrow it, clad in clerk-like black, was surmounted by a head of form and expression the most noble and sweet. His black hair curled crisply about an expanded forehead; his eyes, softly brown, twinkled with varying expression,



though the prevalent feeling was sad; and the nose slightly curved, and delicately carved at the nostril, with the lower outline of the face regularly oval, completed a head which was finely placed on the shoulders, and gave importance, and even dignity, to a diminutive and shadowy stem. Who shall describe his countenance—catch its quivering sweetness—and fix it for ever in words? There are none, alas! to answer the vain desire of friendship. Deep thought, striving with humour; the lines of suffering wreathed into cordial mirth; and a smile of painful sweetness, present an image to the mind it can as little describe as lose. His personal appearance and manner are not unfitly characterised by what he himself says in one of his letters to Manning of Braham—‘a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel.’

“He took my arm, and we walked to the Temple, Lamb stammering out fine remarks as we walked; and when we reached his staircase, he detained me with an urgency which would not be denied, and we mounted to the top story, where an old petted servant, called Becky, was ready to receive us. We were soon seated beside a cheerful fire; hot water and its better adjuncts were before us; and Lamb insisted on my sitting with him while he smoked ‘one pipe’—for, alas! for poor human nature—he had resumed his acquaintance with his ‘fair traitress.’ How often the pipe and the glasses were replenished, I will not undertake to disclose; but I can never forget the conversation: though the first, it was more solemn, and in higher mood, than any I ever after had with Lamb through the whole of our friendship. How it took such a turn between two strangers, one of them a lad of not quite twenty, I cannot tell; but so it happened. We discoursed then of life and death, and our anticipation of a world beyond the grave. Lamb spoke of these awful themes with the simplest piety, but expressed his own fond cleavings to life—to all well-known accustomed things—and a shivering (not shuddering) sense of that which is to come, which he so finely indicated in his ‘New Year’s Eve,’ years afterwards. It was two o’clock before we parted, when Lamb gave me a hearty invitation to renew my visit at pleasure; but two or three months elapsed before I saw him again.

“In the meantime, a number of the ‘Pamphleteer’ contained an ‘Essay on the Chief Living Poets,’ among whom on the title appeared the name of Lamb, and some page or two were expressly

devoted to his praises. It was a poor tissue of tawdry eulogies—a shallow outpouring of young enthusiasm in fine words, which it mistakes for thoughts; yet it gave Lamb, who had hitherto received scarcely civil notice from reviewers, great pleasure to find that any one recognised him as having a place among poets. The next time I saw him, he came almost breathless into the office, and proposed to give me what I should have chosen as the greatest of all possible honours and delights—an introduction to Wordsworth, who I learned, with a palpitating heart, was actually at the next door. I hurried out with my kind conductor, and a minute after was presented by Lamb to the person whom in all the world I venerated most, with this preface:—‘Wordsworth, give me leave to introduce to you my only admirer.’”

The literary unproductiveness of this period seems to have been due, at any rate in part, to overwork at the East India House. Nominally the hours were nine to three, but we find Lamb writing to Wordsworth on April 7th: “I should have written before, but I am cruelly engaged and like to be. On Friday I was at office from 10 in the morning (two hours dinner except) to 11 at night, last night till 9. My business and office business in general has increased so. I don’t mean I am there every night, but I must expect a great deal of it. I never leave till 4—and do not keep a holyday now once in ten times, where I used to keep all red letter days, and some fine days besides which I used to dub Nature’s holydays. I have had my day. I had formerly little to do. So of the little that is left of life I may reckon two thirds as dead, for Time that a man may call his own is his Life, and hard work and thinking about it taints even the leisure hours, stains Sunday with workday contemplations. This is Sunday, and the headache I have is part late hours at work the 2 preceding nights and part later hours over a consoling pipe afterwards. But I find stupid acquiescence coming over me. I bend to the yoke, and it is almost with me and my household as with the man and his consort—

To them each evening had its glittering star  
And every Sabbath day its golden sun—<sup>1</sup>

to such straits am I driven for the Life of life, Time—O that from that superfluity of Holyday leisure my youth wasted ‘Age might but take some hours youth wanted not.’ *N.B.*—I have left off

<sup>1</sup> In the *Excursion*, Book V.

spirituous liquors for 4 or more months, with a moral certainty of its lasting." The same strain of India House weariness breaks out again, in the fine letter to Wordsworth on April 28th: "I don't often go out a maying. *Must* is the tense with me now. Do you take the Pun? . . . I wish you would write more criticism, about Spenser &c. I think I could say something about him myself—but Lord bless me—these 'merchants and their spicy drugs' which are so harmonious to sing of, they lime-twig up my poor soul and body, till I shall forget I ever thought myself a bit of a genius! I can't even put a few thoughts on paper for a newspaper. I 'engross,' when I should pen a paragraph. Confusion blast all mercantile transactions, all traffick, exchange of commodities, intercourse between nations, all the consequent civilization and wealth and amity and link of society, and getting rid of prejudices, and knowledge of the face of the globe—and rot the very firs of the forest that look so romantic alive, and die into desks. Vale." None the less Lamb's two April letters to Wordsworth, criticising the 1815 edition of his poems, are fine literature.

On August 9th, however, an improvement seems possible. "I have a glimmering aspect, a chink-light of liberty before me which I pray God may prove not fallacious. My remonstrances have stirred up others to remonstrate, and altogether, there is a plan for separating certain parts of business from our department, which if it take place will produce me more time, i.e. my evenings free. It may be a means of placing me in a more conspicuous situation which will knock at my nerves another way, but I wait the issue in submission. If I can but begin my own day at 4 o' Clock in the afternoon, I shall think myself to have Eden days of peace and liberty to what I have had. . . . If I do but get rid of auditing Warehousekeepers' Accounts and get no worse-harassing task in the place of it, what a Lord of Liberty I shall be. I shall dance and skip and make mouths at the invisible event, and pick the thorns out of my pillow and throw 'em at rich men's night caps, and talk blank verse, hoity toity, and sing A Clerk I was in London Gay, ban, ban, Ca-Caliban, like the emancipated monster, and go where I like up this street or down that alley."

Lamb's hopes were largely fulfilled. In 1815 a reorganisation of labour and salary was effected, consequent upon the loss of a considerable part of the trading privileges of the Company, from which Lamb emerged triumphant, his salary rising suddenly from



about £240 to £480, whence it was to mount steadily to £700, in 1821, and £730 in his last year of office.<sup>1</sup>

The year, although no essays are credited to it, produced some excellent letters of criticism to Wordsworth upon the 1815 edition of his poems, and of nonsense to Manning in China. It was also in 1815 that Mary Lamb made her first joke. Lamb, reading Wordsworth's poem, "The Strid," looked up to ask her, "as if putting a riddle, 'What is good for a bootless bene?' To which, with infinite presence of mind (as the jest-book has it), she answered, 'a shoeless pea.' It was the first joke she ever made."

Some of Crabb Robinson's entries follow:—

"Jan. 23rd, 1815:—I then went to Lamb; he was glad to see me. He complained of his solitary evenings and that he was harassed by the business of his office, which, with the affliction his sister's illness caused him, renders his life wretched. He is indeed unhappy. I will try to be frequent in my visits for they relieve his spirits.

"Feb. 7th, 1815:—At 9 I sat with Lamb. He was low-spirited. Miss Lamb's protracted illness and the difficulties he finds in the business of his office almost distract him." On February 26th, however, we are glad to find that Mary Lamb was one of a party at Alsager's, Barnes being another. Thomas Massa Alsager, a friend of Robinson, was a musical and financial writer on the *Times*.

In May of this year the Wordsworths were in town, and Robinson records meeting them several times at the Lambs'. He adds to one of his entries: "Hazlitt said in his ferocious way at Alsager's that if Lamb in his criticism [in the *Quarterly*] had found but one fault with Wordsworth, he would never have forgiven him. But some truth there is in the extravagant statement."

"May 23rd, Tuesday:—I went to Lamb and took tea with Wordsworth there. Alsager, B. Field, Talfourd, the Colliers, etc., stepped in later. . . . Miss Hutchinson was at L.'s this evening: she is a plain woman—rather repulsive at first—but she

<sup>1</sup> To have a friend in a Government or Public Office was not without advantage. On April 27th of this year I find Wordsworth writing to Mr. R. P. Gillies, at Edinburgh (in a note which, I think, has not been published): "By means of a Friend in London I can have my letters free. His name is Lamb and if you add an *e* to his name he will not open them. Direct as below without anything further:—

Mr. Lambe, India House, London."

Coleridge had also made use of the same economical device.

improves on acquaintance greatly. She is a lively and sensible little woman." This was Sarah Hutchinson, Mrs. Wordsworth's sister, who drew from Lamb so many good letters.

"May 25th:—I accompanied Miss Lamb to the theatre, where we were joined by the Wordsworths." They saw Kean in "Richard II." And on May 28th Robinson again met the Wordsworths, first at Collier's and then at the Lambs'. He records that he began to feel "quite cordial with Mrs. Wordsworth."

The battle of Waterloo naturally has no mention in Lamb's correspondence—such trivialities did not interest him—but in August we find him remarking to Southey: "Don't you think Louis the Desirable is in a sort of quandary? After all, Buona-parté is a fine fellow, as my barber says, and I should not mind standing bareheaded at his table to do him service in his fall. They should have given him Hampton Court or Kensington, with a tether extending forty miles round London. Qu. Would not the people have ejected the Brunswicks some day in his favour? Well, we shall see."

Crabb Robinson again. "June 17th:—I went late to Lamb's. His party were there, and a numerous and odd set they were—for the greater part interesting and amusing people—George Dyer Captain and Martin Burney, Ayrton, Phillips, Hazlitt and wife, Alsager, Barron Field, Coulson, John Collier, Talfourd, White, Lloyd, and Basil Montagu. Montagu I had never been in company with; his feeling face and gentle tones are very interesting, but it is said that those tones are all adopted *ad captandum*. Perhaps in B. Montagu affectation is become a habit and so lost its nature. Wordsworth says he is a 'philanthropized courtier.' The name of Lloyd is the only surprise in Robinson's list. It would be Charles Lloyd, now forty years old, in London for a brief visit to arrange for the publication of his translation of Alfieri. Coulson would be Walter Coulson of the *Morning Chronicle*, "The Walking Encyclopædia" as he was called.

I conjecture, for reasons stated on page 23, that it was in the summer of 1815 that Charles and Mary Lamb, with Barron Field, made their famous journey to Mackery End, to revive old memories and see what manner of folk their cousins were. Lamb's writings contain nothing more simply charming than the essay that describes this excursion.

“The only thing left was to get into the house—and that was a difficulty which to me singly would have been insurmountable ; for I am terribly shy in making myself known to strangers and out-of-date kinsfolk. Love, stronger than scruple, winged my cousin in without me ; but she soon returned with a creature that might have sat to a sculptor for the image of Welcome. It was the youngest of the Gladmans ; who, by marriage with a Bruton, had become mistress of the old mansion. A comely brood are the Brutons. Six of them, females, were noted as the handsomest young women in the county. But this adopted Bruton, in my mind, was better than they all—more comely. She was born too late to have remembered me. She just recollected in early life to have had her cousin Bridget once pointed out to her, climbing a style. But the name of kindred, and of cousinship, was enough. Those slender ties, that prove slight as gossamer in the rending atmosphere of a metropolis, bind faster, as we found it, in hearty, homely, loving Hertfordshire. In five minutes we were as thoroughly acquainted as if we had been born and bred up together ; were familiar, even to the calling each other by our Christian names. So Christians should call one another. To have seen Bridget, and her—it was like the meeting of the two scriptural cousins ! There was a grace and dignity, an amplitude of form and stature, answering to her mind, in this farmer’s wife, which would have shined in a palace—or so we thought it. We were made welcome by husband and wife equally—we, and our friend that was with us—I had almost forgotten him—but B. F. [Barron Field] will not so soon forget that meeting, if peradventure he shall read this on the far distant shores where the Kangaroo haunts. The fatted calf was made ready, or rather was already so, as if in anticipation of our coming ; and, after an appropriate glass of native wine, never let me forget with what honest pride this hospitable cousin made us proceed to Wheathampstead, to introduce us (as some new-found rarity) to her mother and sister Gladmans, who did indeed know something more of us, at a time when she almost knew nothing.—With what corresponding kindness we were received by them also—how Bridget’s memory, exalted by the occasion, warmed into a thousand half-obliterated recollections of things and persons, to my utter astonishment, and her own—and to the astoundment of B. F. who sat by, almost the only thing that was not a cousin there,—old effaced images of



more than half-forgotten names and circumstances still crowding back upon her, as words written in lemon come out upon exposure to a friendly warmth,—when I forget all this, then may my country cousins forget me ; and Bridget no more remember, that in the days of weakling infancy I was her tender charge—as I have been her care in foolish manhood since—in those pretty pastoral walks, long ago, about Mackery End, in Hertfordshire.”

And here a word or so of B. F., to whom Lamb addressed the *Elia* essay on “ Distant Correspondents.” Barron Field, whose father was Henry Field, apothecary to Christ’s Hospital (after Lamb’s day), was by more than eight years Lamb’s junior. When they first met I cannot say, but the introduction was probably through his brother, Francis John Field, who was a clerk in the India House. Barron Field varied his legal studies with literature, contributed to the *Reflector*, and was for a while dramatic critic for the *Times*. Later in life he edited Heywood for the old Shakespeare Society. In 1816 he obtained the post of Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, and remained in Australia until 1824. Returning to England he tarried only a short time and then left again, to be Chief Justice at Gibraltar, where the young Disraeli, airily travelling through Europe, found him a bore. Field seems to have been a kindly and intelligent man, but he lives rather by his place in Lamb’s writings than by any literary merit of his own.

Among the Crabb Robinson papers is an interesting letter from Field on February 16th, 1835, on the subject of Lamb’s biographer. “ I thank you for your account of our dear friend Lamb’s death and of Mary Lamb’s death-in-life. Their lives should be written together ; and I understand Moxon means to do it. I shall send him my letters. In the meantime the works should be collected from all quarters : *The Reflector*, *The London*, *The Examiner*, *The Athenæum*, *The New Times*, *Hone*, &c., and certainly including *Mrs. Leicester’s School*. Southey would make the best Editor. I should make the next best. But I think Moxon will do very well. I know Lamb had been long feeding him with materials and letters for his life. . . . Talfourd has too much to do and would write too fine. But heavens preserve us from a monster of the name of Forster ! Having written the memoir of Coleridge for Longman’s last Annual Biography, I have promised something of Lamb for the next ; but my trickle will stand in no biographer’s way.”

Field's article in the *Annual Biography* for 1836 does not contain anything very intimately informing; but he makes an interesting point in remarking that the stories and characters of all Lamb's plays, poems and essays turn upon some weakness of humanity with which he had a lively sympathy and towards which he extended a large charity. But with the following judgment it is not easy to be wholly in agreement: "In his estimation of prints and pictures, as well as of actors and actresses, we think that, like all near-sighted people, he had 'visions of his own,' and would not 'undo them.'" Field seems to me here rather to defend his own differences of opinion than to convince Lamb of bad judgment or prejudice.

Barron Field died in 1841; his widow, born Jane Carncroft, to whom Lamb had written verses, survived until 1878. Lamb knew also other members of the Field family, and in 1824 he wrote a prologue for an amateur performance of "Richard II." to be given at Henry Field's house. The late Miss Mary Louisa Field, to whom also he addressed some lines, told Canon Ainger that she sat by Lamb's side during the play, and among his drolleries remembered particularly how, on a looking-glass being broken, he turned to her and whispered "Sax-pence!" while when the butler announced a Mr. Negus, he called out "Hand him round!" This may possibly have been the occasion of another story, told of Lamb, which makes him say that of all the company he liked the prompter best—because he heard him most and saw him least.

The Fields, though an old Hertfordshire family, were no connection of Lamb's grandmother, Mary Field, nor, I think, of his godfather, Francis Fielde.

The August correspondence yields some good passages. To Southey: "I am going to stand godfather; I don't like the business; I cannot muster up decorum for these occasions; I shall certainly disgrace the font. I was at Hazlitt's marriage, and had like to have been turned out several times during the ceremony. Any thing awful makes me laugh. I misbehaved once at a funeral. Yet I can read about these ceremonies with pious and proper feelings. The realities of life only seem the mockeries." (I have not discovered what child's sins it was that Lamb was to take upon himself.)

To Wordsworth, apropos of Talfourd's presents of fruit: "There is something inexpressibly pleasant to me in these

*presents*. Be it fruit, or fowl, or brawn, or *what not*. *Books* are a legitimate cause of acceptance. If presents be not the soul of friendship, undoubtedly they are the most spiritual part of the body of that intercourse. There is too much narrowness of thinking in this point. The punctilio of acceptance methinks is too confined and straitlaced. I could be content to receive money, or clothes, or a joint of meat from a friend; why should he not send me a dinner as well as a dessert? I would taste him in the beasts of the field, and thro' all creation. Therefore did the basket of fruit of the juvenile Talfourd not displease me. Not that I have any thoughts of bartering or reciprocating these things. To send him any thing in return would be to reflect suspicion of mercenariness upon what I know he meant a freewill offering. Let him overcome me in bounty. In this strife a generous nature loves to be overcome."

And in August came a happy interlude, described very charmingly in a letter of Mary Lamb to Miss Hutchinson, which I print almost in full—one of the best letters from Mary Lamb's pen that exists.

[Dated at end: August 20, 1815.]

"I am going to do a queer thing—I have wearied myself with writing a long letter to Mrs. Morgan a part of which is an incoherent rambling account of a jaunt we have just been taking. I want to tell you all about it for we so seldom do such things that it runs strangely in my head and I feel too tired to give you other than the mere copy of the nonsense I have just been writing.

"Last Saturday was the grand feast day of the India House Clerks. I think you must have heard Charles talk of his yearly turtle feast. He has been lately much wearied with work, and, glad to get rid of all connected with it, he *used* Saturday, the feast day being a holiday, *borrowed* the Monday following, and we set off on the outside of the Cambridge Coach from Fetter Lane at eight o'clock and were driven into Cambridge in great triumph by Hell Fire Dick five minutes before three—Richard is in high reputation, he is private tutor to the Whip Club. Journeys used to be tedious torments to me, but seated out in the open air I enjoyed every mile of the way—the first twenty miles was particularly pleasing to me, having been accustomed to go so far on that road in the Ware Stage Coach to visit my Grandmother in the days of other times.



“ ‘In my life I never spent so many pleasant hours together as I did at Cambridge. We were walking the whole time—out of one College into another. If you ask me which I like best I must make the children’s traditional unoffending reply to all curious enquirers, “*Both.*” I liked them all best. The little gloomy ones, because they were little gloomy ones. I felt as if I could live and die in them and never wish to speak again. And the fine grand Trinity College Oh how fine it was! And King’s College Chapel, what a place! I heard the Cathedral service there, and having been no great church goer of late years *that* and the painted windows and the general effect of the whole thing affected me wonderfully.

“ ‘I certainly like St. John’s College best—I had seen least of it, having only been over it once, so, on the morning we returned I got up at six o’clock and wandered into it by myself—by myself indeed, for there was nothing alive to be seen but one cat who followed me about like a dog. Then I went over Trinity, but nothing hailed me there, not even a cat.

“ ‘On the Sunday we met with a pleasant thing. We had been congratulating each other that we had come alone to enjoy, as the miser his feast, all our sights greedily to ourselves, but having seen all we began to grow flat and wish for this and tother body with us, when we were accosted by a young gownsman whose face we knew but where or how we had seen him we could not tell, and were obliged to ask his name: he proved to be a young man we had seen twice at Alsager’s. He turned out a very pleasant fellow—shewed us the insides of places—we took him to our Inn to dinner, and drank tea with him in such a delicious college room, and then again he supped with us. We made our meals as short as possible, to lose no time, and walked our young conductor almost off his legs. Even when the fried eels were ready for supper and coming up, having a message from a man who we had bribed for the purpose, that then we might see Oliver Cromwell,<sup>1</sup> who was *not at home* when we called to see him, we sallied out again and made him a visit by candlelight—and so ended our sights. When we were setting out in the morning our new friend came to bid us good bye and rode with us as far as Trompington. I never saw a creature so happy as he was the whole time he was with us, he

<sup>1</sup> Cooper’s portrait of Cromwell at Sidney-Sussex.

said we had put him in such good spirits that [he] should certainly pass an examination well that he is to go through in six weeks in order to qualify himself to obtain a fellowship.

“ ‘ Returning home down old Fetter Lane I could hardly keep from crying to think it was all over. With what pleasure [Charles] shewed me Jesus College where Coleridge was—the barbe[r’s] shop] where Manning was—the house where Lloyd lived—Franklin’s rooms (a young schoolfellow with whom Charles was the first time he went to Cambridge), I peeped in at his window, the room looked quite deserted—old chairs standing about in disorder that seemed to have stood there ever since they had sate in them. I write sad nonsense about these things, but I wish you had heard Charles talk his nonsense over and over again about his visit to Franklin and how he then first felt himself commencing gentleman and had eggs for his breakfast.’ Charles Lamb commencing gentleman !

“ A lady who is sitting by me seeing what I am doing says I remind her of her husband, who acknowledged that the first love letter he wrote to her was a copy of one he had made use of on a former occasion. . . .”

Charles Lamb adds : “ Dear Miss Hutchinson, I subscribe most willingly to all my sister says of her Enjoyment at Cambridge. She was in silent raptures all the while *there*, and came home riding thro’ the air (her 1st long outside journey) triumphing as if she had been *graduated*. I remember one foolish-pretty expression she made use of, ‘ Bless the little churches how pretty they are ’ as those symbols of civilized life opened upon her view one after the other on this side Cambridge. You cannot proceed a mile without starting a steeple, with its little patch of villagery round it enverduring the waste. I don’t know how you will pardon part of her letter being a transcript, but writing to another Lady first (probably as the *easiest task*) it was unnatural not to give you an accot. of what had so freshly delighted her, and would have been a piece of transcendant rhetorick (above her modesty) to have given two different accounts of a simple and univocal pleasure. Bless me how learned I write ! but I always forget myself when I write to Ladies. One cannot tame ones erudition down to their merely English apprehensions.”

In September Mary Lamb was again ill. Writing to Sarah Hutchinson Lamb says : “ The return of her disorder has been frightfully soon this time, with scarce a six month’s interval. I

am almost afraid my worry of spirits about the E. I. House was partly the cause of her illness, but one always imputes it to the cause next at hand ; more probably it comes from some cause we have no control over or conjecture of. It cuts sad great slices out of the time, the little time we shall have to live together. I don't know but the recurrence of these illnesses might help me to sustain her death better than if we had had no partial separations. But I won't talk of death. I will imagine us immortal, or forget that we are otherwise. By God's blessing in a few weeks we may be making our meal together, or sitting in the front row of the Pit at Drury Lane, or taking our evening walk past the theatres, to look at the outside of them at least, if not to be tempted in. Then we forget we are assailable, we are strong for the time as rocks, the wind is tempered to the shorn Lambs."

On November 14th Robinson writes : " After nine I called on Charles Lamb. He was much better in health and spirits than when I saw him last. Though tête-à-tête, he was able to pun. I was speaking of my first brief, when he asked, ' Did you not exclaim when you had your first brief—

Thou Great First Cause, least understood ? "'<sup>1</sup>

" Nov. 20th, 1815 :—I called late on Lamb to see Miss L., who I understood was returned. I found Lamb's brother (John) there, and played whist with him and Martin Burney and Miss L. John L. is so grossly rude and vulgar so that I am resolved never to play with him again.

" November 24th, 1815 :—I called on Lamb, and chatted an hour with him. Talfourd stepped in, and we had a pleasant hour's conversation. Lamb has a very exclusive taste, and spoke with equal contempt of Voltaire's *Tales* and ' *Gil Blas*.' He may be right in thinking the latter work belongs to a low class of compositions, but he ought not to deny its excellence in its kind."

We may take leave of the year 1815 with a passage of delicious nonsense from a letter to Manning, written on Christmas Day : " Your friends have all got old—those you left blooming—myself (who am one of the few that remember you), those golden hairs which you recollect my taking a pride in, turned to silvery and grey. Mary has been dead and buried many years—she desired to be buried in the silk gown you sent her. Rickman, that you

<sup>1</sup> Pope's " Universal Prayer ".



remember active and strong, now walks out supported by a servant-maid and a stick. Martin Burney is a very old man. . . . Coleridge is just dead, having lived just long enough to close the eyes of Wordsworth, who paid the debt to nature but a week or two before. Poor Col., but two days before he died, he wrote to a bookseller proposing an epic poem on the 'Wanderings of Cain,' in twenty-four books. It is said he has left behind him more than forty thousand treatises in criticism and metaphysics but few of them in a state of completion. They are now destined, perhaps, to wrap up spices." Lamb's news of himself is that he has gone into the Fishmongers' Almshouses.

On the following day Lamb wrote again, more seriously. "This very night I am going to *leave off tobacco!* Surely there must be some other world in which this unconquerable purpose shall be realised."

In 1816 there are only six letters, and Lamb, so far as I am aware, wrote nothing. But it was a peculiarly happy year. We know Lamb's work in the East India House to have been lightened and his salary doubled; there is no record of Mary Lamb having been taken ill; the brother and sister had a month's holiday at Calne with the Morgans, in the summer, and on returning went with delight into lodgings at Dalston, which was then a rural spot, in order to continue to benefit by country air; while, added to this, Coleridge returned to London and, after a lapse or so, began what promised to be a more rational and healthy mode of life under Gillman's care.

Crabb Robinson helps us to a few facts:—

"Feb. 12th, 1816:—To Drury Lane with Jane Collier and Miss Lamb to see 'A New Way to Pay Old Debts.' Kean as Sir Giles Overreach.

"April 6th, 1816:—I met Miss Lamb by accident, and in consequence took tea with her and Charles. I found Coleridge and Morgan at their house. Coleridge . . . is endeavouring to bring a tragedy on the stage. . . ." The tragedy was "Zapolya," which was, however, refused by Drury Lane (although performed later, with modifications, at the Royal Circus and Surrey Theatre) and ultimately published as "A Christmas Tale."

Coleridge had just come to town from Calne, hoping to sell his play. Writing to Wordsworth on April 9th, Lamb says: "Nature who conducts every creature by instinct to its best end, has skilfully directed C. to take up his abode at a Chemist's

Laboratory in Norfolk Street. She might as well have sent a *Helluo Librorum* for cure to the Vatican. God keep him inviolate among the traps and pitfalls. He has done pretty well as yet." Coleridge, however, knew himself to be in a critical state, and on the day of Lamb's letter consulted Dr. Adams of Hatton Garden as to the possibility of leaving off opium. Adams wrote to James Gillman of Highgate suggesting that in Coleridge he would find a resident patient of great interest; and on April 18th Coleridge entered Gillman's house in the Grove, with the proof sheets of "Christabel" in his hand, there to remain until his death eighteen years later.

On April 20th Lamb, who had been correcting the revises of Wordsworth's "Letter to a Friend of Burns," and of his "Thanksgiving Ode," tells the news. "Coleridge is printing *Christabel* by Lord Byron's recommendation to Murray, with what he calls a vision, *Kubla Khan*, which said vision he repeats so enchantingly that it irradiates and brings heaven and Elysian bowers into my parlour while he sings or says it. . . . He is at present under the medical care of a Mr. Gilman (Killman?) a Highgate Apothecary, where he plays at leaving off Laud—m. I think his essentials not touched; he is very bad, but then he wonderfully picks up another day, and his face when he repeats his verses hath its ancient glory, an Archangel a little damaged.

"Will Miss H. pardon our not replying at length to her kind Letter? We are not quiet enough. Morgan is with us every day, going betwixt Highgate and the Temple. Coleridge is absent but 4 miles, and the neighbourhood of such a man is as exciting as the presence of 50 ordinary Persons. 'Tis enough to be within the whiff and wind of his genius, for us not to possess our souls in quiet. If I lived with him or the *author of the Excursion*, I should in a very little time lose my own identity, and be dragged along in the current of other peoples' thoughts, hampered in a net. How cool I sit in this office, with no possible interruption further than what I may term *material*."

On July 13th Crabb Robinson makes Lamb as "delighted as a child" by giving Miss Lamb a framed print of Leonardo da Vinci's "Virgin of the Rocks," a picture upon which both brother and sister wrote poems. "I am to change the frame for him, as all his other frames are black. How Lamb confirms the remark of the child-likeness of Genius!"

A little later in the month the Lambs left London on their visit to Calne, in Wiltshire. Towards its close Lamb wrote to Henry Dodwell, a fellow clerk at the India House, one of his most amusing letters. "Heigh Ho! Lord have mercy upon me, how many does two and two make? I am afraid I shall make a poor clerk in future, I am spoiled with rambling among haycocks and cows and pigs. . . ."

"Adieu! ye fields, ye shepherds and—herdesses, and dairies and cream-pots, and fairies and dances upon the green.

"I come, I come. Don't drag me so hard by the hair of my head, Genius of British India! I know my hour is come, Faustus must give up his soul, O Lucifer, O Mephistopheles!"

A very interesting letter from Lamb to Wordsworth, post-marked September 23rd, gives us much information: "It seems an age since we have corresponded, but indeed the interim has been stuffd out with more variety than usually checquers my same-seeming existence.—Mercy on me, what a traveller have I been since I wrote you last! what foreign wonders have been explored! I have seen Bath, King Bladud's ancient well, fair Bristol, seed-plot of suicidal Chatterton, Marlbro', Chippenham, Calne, famous for nothing in particular that I know of—but such a vertigo of locomotion has not seized us for years. We spent a month with the Morgans at the last named Borough—August—and such a change has the change wrought in us that we could not stomach wholesome Temple air, but are absolutely rustivating (O the gentility of it) at Dalston, about one mischievous boy's stone's throw off Kingsland Turnpike, one mile from Shoreditch church, thence we emanate in various directions to Hackney, Clapton, Totnam, and such like romantic country. That my lungs should ever prove so dainty as to fancy they perceive differences of air! but so it is, tho' I am almost ashamed of it. Like Milton's devil (turn'd truant to his old Brimstone) I am purging off the foul air of my once darling tobacco in this Eden, absolutely snuffing up pure gales, like old worn out Sin playing at being innocent, which never comes again, for in spite of good books and good thoughts there is something in a Pipe that virtue cannot give tho' she give her unendowed person for a dowry."

Lamb goes on to refer to a recent article on Coleridge by Hazlitt: "Have you read the review of Coleridge's character,



person, physiognomy &c. in the *Examiner*—his features even to his *nose*—O horrible license beyond the old Comedy. He is himself gone to the sea side with his favorite Apothecary, having left for publication as I hear a prodigious mass of composition for a Sermon to the middling ranks of people to persuade them they are not so distressed as is commonly supposed. Methinks he should recite it to a congregation of Bilston Colliers,—the fate of Cinna the Poet would instantaneously be his. God bless him, but certain that rogue-*Examiner* has beset him in most unmannerly strains. Yet there is a kind of respect shines thro' the disrespect that to those who know the rare compound (that is the subject of it) almost balances the reproof, but then those who know him but partially or at a distance are so extremely apt to drop the qualifying part thro' their fingers. . . . By the way, I have seen Coleridge but once this 3 or 4 months. He is an odd person: when he first comes to town he is quite hot upon visiting, and then he turns off and absolutely never comes at all, but seems to forget there are any such people in the world. I made one attempt to visit him (a morning call) at Highgate, but there was something in him or his apothecary which I found so unattractively-repulsing-from any temptation to call again, that I stay away as naturally as a Lover visits. The rogue gives you Love Powders, and then a strong horse drench to bring 'em off your stomach that they mayn't hurt you."

Hazlitt's article on Coleridge, in the *Examiner* of September 8th, 1816, took the form of a prospective notice of Coleridge's *Lay Sermon on the Distresses of the Country, addressed to the Middle and Higher Orders*. Here are a few sentences: "He is the dog in the manger of literature, an intellectual marplot, who will neither let anybody else come to a conclusion, nor come to one himself. . . . Two things are indispensable to him—to set out from no premises and to arrive at no conclusion. . . . His mind is in a constant state of flux and reflux; he is like the Sea Horse in the ocean; he is the man in the moon, the Wandering Jew. . . . Mr. Shandy would have settled the question at once:—'You have little or no nose, Sir.'"

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* has this reference to the article: "Dec. 21st, 1816 [at Gillman's]:—He [Coleridge] mentioned Hazlitt's attack with greater moderation than I expected. He complains, and with reason I think, of Lamb, who, he says, ought not to

admit a man into his house who abuses the confidence of private intercourse so scandalously. He denies H., however, originality, and ascribes to L. the best ideas in H.'s article.<sup>1</sup> He was not displeased to hear of his being knocked down by John Lamb lately."

And Crabb Robinson also has the following entry referring to the same matter as it was discussed at Lamb's: "We talked of Hazlitt's late ferocious attack on Coleridge, which Lamb thought fair enough, between the parties; but he was half angry with Martin Burney for asserting that the praise was greater than the abuse. 'Nobody,' said Lamb, 'will care about or understand the "taking up the deep pauses of conversation between Seraphs and Cardinals," but the satire will be universally felt. Such an article is like saluting a man, "Sir, you are the greatest man I ever saw," and then pulling him by the nose.'"

Lamb's letter to Wordsworth also has this passage: "Gifford (whom God curse) has persuaded squinting Murray (whom may God not bless) not to accede to an offer Field made for me to print 2 vols. of Essays, to include the one on Hog<sup>rth</sup>. and 1 or 2 more, but most of the matter to be new, but I dare say I should never have found time to make them; M. would have had 'em, but shewed specimens from the Reflector to G—— as he acknowledged to Field, and Crispin did for me. 'Not on his soal but on his soul damn'd Jew' may the malediction of my eternal antipathy light." The collected edition of Lamb's essays and poems which Murray refused was, as we shall see, published by the Olliers in 1818. A little later Lamb tried to level up his account against Gifford by a sonnet (see page 406), wherein his early connection with shoemaking was again insisted upon, in a manner which even antagonists of otherwise refined minds permitted themselves in those days.

A letter from Mary Lamb to Sarah Hutchinson, in November, amplifies the story of the Dalston rustication. "We have passed ten, I may call them very good, weeks at Dalston, for they completely answered the purpose for which we went. Reckoning our

<sup>1</sup> We have seen Lamb's reference to Coleridge as an archangel a little damaged. In Hazlitt's article we read: "If he had had but common moral principle, that is, sincerity, he would have been a great man; nor hardly, as it is, appears to us—

Less than arch-angel ruined, and the excess  
Of glory obscur'd."

Hazlitt may have heard Lamb's epithet, backed probably by the same passage from *Paradise Lost*.

happy month at Calne we have had quite a rural summer and have obtained a very clear idea of the great benefit of quiet—of early hours and time intirely at ones own disposal, and no small advantages these things are, but the return to old friends, the sight of old familiar faces round me, has almost reconciled me to occasional headachs and fits of peevish weariness—even London streets, which I sometimes used to think it hard to be eternally doomed to walk through before I could see a green field, seem quite delightful.

“ Charles smoked but one pipe while we were at Dalston and he has not transgressed much since his return. I hope he will only smoke now with his fellow-smokers which will give him five or six clear days in the week. . . . I have just been reading your kind letter over again and find you had some doubt whether we had left the Temple entirely. It was merely a lodging we took to recruit our health and spirits. From the time we left Calne Charles drooped sadly, company became quite irksome, and his anxious desire to leave off smoking and his utter inability to perform his daily resolutions against it became quite a torment to him, so I prevailed with him to try the experiment of change of scene and set out in one of the short stage coaches from Bishopsgate Street, Miss Brent and I, and we looked over all the little places within three miles and fixed on one quite countrified and not two miles from Shoreditch Church and entered upon it the next day. I thought if we stayed but a week it would be a little rest and respite from our troubles, and we made a ten weeks stay and very comfortable we were, so much so that if ever Charles is superannuated on a small pension, which is the great object of his ambition, and we felt our income straitened, I do think I could live in the country entirely ; at least I thought so while I was there, but since I have been at home I wish to live and die in the Temple where I was born. We left the trees so green it looked like early autumn, and can see but one leaf ‘ The last of its clan ’ on our poor old Hare Court trees. What a rainy summer !—and yet I have been so much out of town and have made so much use of every fine day that I can hardly help thinking it has been a fine summer. We calculated we walked three hundred and fifty miles while we were in our country lodging. One thing I must tell you, Charles came round every morning to a shop near the Temple to get shaved.

“ Last Sunday we had such a pleasant day I must tell you of it.



We went to Kew and saw the old Palace where the King was brought up, it was the pleasantest sight I ever saw, I can scarcely tell you why, but a charming old woman shewed it to us. She had lived twenty six years there and spoke with such a hearty love of our good old King, whom all the world seems to have forgotten, that it did me good to hear her. She was as proud in pointing out the plain furniture, (and I am sure you are now sitting in a larger and better furnished room) of a small room in which the King always dined, nay more proud of the simplicity of her royal master's taste, than any show-er of Carlton House can be in showing the fine things there, and so she was when she made us remark the smallness of one of the Princesses' bedrooms and said she slept and also dressed in that little room. There are a great many good pictures but I was most pleased with one of the King when he was about two years old, such a pretty little white-headed boy."

Crabb Robinson, who had spent his long vacation in the Lakes, has a few entries touching the Lambs at the end of the year:—

"November 2nd:—At ten o'clock I called on the Lambs. Burney was there, and we played a rubber, and afterwards Talfourd stepped in. We had a long chat together. We talked of puns, wit, &c. Lamb has no respect for any wit which turns on a serious thought. He positively declared that he thought his joke upon my 'great first cause, least understood,' a bad one, as well as the 'luke warm Christian' applied to Evanson. On the other hand, he said, 'If you will quote any one of my jokes, quote this, which is really a good one. Hume and his wife and several of their children were with me. Hume repeated the old saying, "One fool makes many." "Ay, Mr. Hume," said [I,] pointing to the company, "you have a fine family."' Neither Talfourd nor I could see the excellence of this." Lamb went on to repeat Coleridge's joke, on Boyer's death, wishing his soul a journey to heaven borne by cherubs, all face and wing, and therefore "without anything to excite his whipping propensities."

"Nov. 12th:—Called late on Lamb. Morgan was with him. Lamb insisted on giving me the 4 Q<sup>o</sup>. volumes of Burke, which I accepted, because I knew he would not read the books himself and had already banished them his library. In return I made him take *La Vierge au Linge*, which I have sent to the frame maker to be made like *La Vierge aux Rochers*.

“Nov. 18th:—I took Miss Lamb with me to see Kean in “Timon.”

In 1816 Hazlitt's attitude of hostility to Wordsworth caused Robinson to cut him. They subsequently engaged in intercourse again, but for a while friendly relations wholly ceased. It was in this connection that Mary Lamb remarked to Robinson, “You are rich in friends. We cannot afford to cast off ours because they are not all we wish.”

## CHAPTER XXXI

1817

Hazlitt and Wordsworth—A Visit to Brighton—Lamb's Thursday Evenings—Talfourd's Description—Procter's Description—Lamb's Way with His Guests—First Meeting with Procter—Thomas Love Peacock—Hazlitt's Account of a Thursday Evening—"Persons One would Wish to Have Seen"—Hazlitt's Quarrel with Lamb—Manning's Return—The Move to Great Russell Street—Coleridge's Plans—The Dinner at Haydon's—Lamb and Keats—Lamb and Shelley—Vincent Novello's Evenings—A Dinner Party.

IN 1817 Lamb wrote nothing that has been preserved beyond a few letters, the best of which is one in rhyme to William Ayrton, who had just produced Mozart's "Don Giovanni" at the Haymarket; while Crabb Robinson's *Diary* yields little of importance. The year is however notable in his life for the move from Inner Temple Lane.

I begin with a passage from the letter to Ayrton :—

I go to the play  
 In a very economical sort of a way,  
 Rather to see  
 Than be seen.  
 Though I'm no ill sight  
 Neither,  
 By candle-light,  
 And in some kinds of weather.  
 You might pit me  
 For height  
 Against Kean ;  
 But in a grand tragic scene  
 I'm nothing :—  
 It would create a kind of loathing  
 To see me act Hamlet ;  
 There'd be many a damn let  
 Fly  
 At my presumption  
 If I should try,  
 Being a fellow of no gumption.



This is Crabb Robinson's first entry :—

“January 29th, 1817:—I called on Lamb. Mrs. Montagu and Miss Brent [Mrs. Morgan's sister] were there. The conversation was on Hazlitt's attack on Coleridge and Wordsworth [to which allusion has already been made]. Lamb spoke sharply in apology for H. and *at me*. He represented the praise of C. as an ample set off, and he thought both C. and W. had deserved this at his hands. At the same time he declared he had quarrelled with Hazlitt about it. He had sent the article against C. to W., who had written about it without feeling, and he had appeared to have been much affected with C. for not noticing as it deserved what L. had related to him about H. viz. : that when he sat down to write a critique on the *Excursion* he actually cried because he was disappointed and could not praise it as it deserved. To which C. gave no answer but by going on with the sentiment that the *Excursion* was a falling off. I saw no reason for this displeasure of L. I do not believe the fact that H. cried and I hardly think L. serious in his vindication of H. At least it is but a momentary feeling.”

In April Robinson records that Miss Lamb is ill again, but on May 24th he writes : “I called on Lamb and was much gratified by finding Miss Lamb there. Both were looking remarkably well. They were also in good spirits. L. was warm in his praise of Southey's early poems and I took them home and read them in bed.”

In the summer came a visit to Brighton with Mrs. Morgan. We have no information as to where they stayed, except that they had sight of the sea, but Mary Lamb tells Dorothy Wordsworth that she and her brother liked walking on the Downs, finding them almost as good as the Westmorland mountains.

In August Lamb sent to Barron Field, in New South Wales, the letter which he afterwards expanded into the *Elia* essay on “Distant Correspondents.” It has this passage : “For my own history, I am just in the same spot, doing the same thing (videlicet, little or nothing) as when you left me ; only I have positive hopes that I shall be able to conquer that inveterate habit of smoking which you may remember I indulged in. I think of making a beginning this evening, viz., Sunday 31st Aug. 1817, not Wednesday, 2d Feb. 1818, as it will be perhaps when you read this for the first time.”

Before, with the Lambs, we leave Inner Temple Lane for ever, I should like to quote one or two descriptions of Lamb's Thursday (late Wednesday) evenings, which, I fancy, were at their best in those rooms. Talfourd, Procter, Hazlitt and Hunt have all left impressions of the company and the conversation to be found there. I begin with Talfourd's account, which, accurate enough in spirit and generalities, is however here and there, as I shall show, a little loose in details: "Now turn to No. 4, Inner Temple Lane, at ten o'clock, when the sedater part of the company are assembled, and the happier stragglers are dropping in from the play. Let it be any autumn or winter month, when the fire is blazing steadily, and the clean-swept hearth and whist-tables speak of the spirit of Mrs. Battle, and serious looks require 'the rigor of the game.' The furniture is old-fashioned and worn; the ceiling low, and not wholly unstained by traces of 'the great plant,' though now virtuously forborne: but the Hogarths, in narrow black frames, abounding in infinite thought, humour and pathos, enrich the walls; and all things wear an air of comfort and hearty English welcome

"Lamb himself, yet unrelaxed by the glass, is sitting with a sort of Quaker primness at the whist-table, the gentleness of his melancholy smile half lost in his intentness on the game; his partner [Godwin], the author of *Political Justice*, (the majestic expression of his large head not disturbed by disproportion of his comparatively diminutive stature,) is regarding his hand with a philosophic but not a careless eye; Captain Burney, only not venerable because so young in spirit, sits between them; and H. C. R. [Robinson], who alone now and then breaks the proper silence, to welcome some incoming guest, is his happy partner—true winner in the game of life, whose leisure achieved early, is devoted to his friends. At another table, just beyond the circle which extends from the fire, sit another four. The broad, burly, jovial bulk of John Lamb, the Ajax Telamon of the slender clerks of the old South Sea House, whom he sometimes introduces to the rooms of his younger brother, surprised to learn from them that he is growing famous, confronts the stately but courteous Alsager; while P. [Phillips], 'his few hairs bristling' at gentle objurgation, watches his partner M. B. [Martin Burney], dealing, with 'soul more white' than the hands of which Lamb once said, 'M., if dirt was trumps, what hands you would hold!' In one corner of the room, you may see the pale earnest countenance of Charles Lloyd, who is discoursing 'of

fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute,' with Leigh Hunt ; and, if you choose to listen, you will scarcely know which most to admire—the severe logic of the melancholy reasoner, or its graceful evasion by the tricksome fantasy of the joyous poet. Basil Montagu, gentle enthusiast in the cause of humanity, which he has lived to see triumphant, is pouring into the outstretched ear of George Dyer some tale of legalised injustice, which the recipient is vainly endeavouring to comprehend. Soon the room fills ; in *slouches* Hazlitt from the theatre, where his stubborn anger for Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo has been softened by Miss Stephens's angelic notes, which might 'chase anger, and grief, and fear, and sorrow, and pain from mortal or immortal minds ;' Kenney, with a tremulous pleasure, announces that there is a crowded house to the ninth representation of his new comedy, of which Lamb lays down his cards to inquire ; or Ayrton, mildly radiant, whispers the continual triumph of 'Don Giovanni,' for which Lamb, incapable of opera, is happy to take his word. Now and then an actor glances on us from 'the rich Cathay' of the world behind the scenes, with news of its brighter human-kind, and with looks reflecting the public favour—Liston, grave beneath the weight of the town's regards—or Miss Kelly, unexhausted in spirit by alternating the drolleries of high farce with the terrible pathos of melodrama,—or Charles Kemble mirrors the chivalry of thought, and ennobles the party by bending on them looks beaming with the aristocracy of nature.

“Meanwhile Becky lays the cloth on the side-table, under the direction of the most quiet, sensible, and kind of women—who soon compels the younger and more hungry of the guests to partake largely of the cold roast lamb or boiled beef, the heaps of smoking roasted potatoes, and the vast jug of porter, often replenished from the foaming pots, which the best tap of Fleet-street supplies. Perfect freedom prevails, save when the hospitable pressure of the mistress excuses excess ; and perhaps, the physical enjoyment of the playgoer exhausted with pleasure, or of the author jaded with the labour of the brain, is not less than that of the guests at the most charming of aristocratic banquets. As the hot water and its accompaniments appear, and the severities of whist relax, the light of conversation thickens : Hazlitt, catching the influence of the spirit from which he has lately begun to abstain, utters some fine criticism with struggling emphasis ; Lamb stam-



mers out puns suggestive of wisdom, for happy Barron Field to admire and echo ; the various dribblets of talk combine into a stream, while Miss Lamb moves gently about to see that each modest stranger is duly served ; turning, now and then, an anxious loving eye on Charles, which is softened into a half humorous expression of resignation to inevitable fate, as he mixes his second tumbler ! ”

Talfourd's fine free way is only too well exemplified in the foregoing passage, which resembles one of the early Italian paintings of the life of a saint, in which all the deeds of his pilgrimage synchronise on the canvas. My meaning will be sufficiently plain when I say that Napoleon was defeated in 1815 ; Ayrton produced “Don Giovanni” in 1817 ; Barron Field left England for Australia in August, 1816 ; Charles Lloyd's second residence in London of any duration did not begin until 1818 ; Crabb Robinson's leisure, although achieved early, dated from 1828 ; and the Lambs left Inner Temple Lane in 1817. As a general impression, however, Talfourd's picture is probably accurate and certainly it has life and persuasiveness.

Procter fills in certain of the gaps. “When you went to Lamb's rooms on the Wednesday evenings, (his ‘At Home,’) you generally found the card table spread out, Lamb himself one of the players. On the corner of the table was a snuff-box ; and the game was enlivened by sundry brief ejaculations and pungent questions, which kept alive the wits of the party present. It was not ‘silent whist !’

“The supper of cold meat, on these occasions, was always on the side table ; not very formal, as may be imagined ; and every one might rise, when it suited him, and cut a slice or take a glass of porter, without reflecting on the abstinence of the rest of the company. Lamb would, perhaps, call out and bid the hungry guest help himself without ceremony. We learn (from Hazlitt) that Martin Burney's eulogies on books were sometimes intermingled with expressions of his satisfaction with the veal pie which employed him at the sideboard. After the game was won (and lost) the ring of the cheerful glasses announced that punch or brandy and water had become the order of the night.

“Politics were rarely discussed amongst them. Anecdotes, characteristic, showing the strong and weak points of human nature, were frequent enough. But politics (especially party

politics) were seldom admitted. Lamb disliked them as a theme for evening talk; he perhaps did not understand the subject scientifically. And when Hazlitt's impetuosity drove him, as it sometimes did, into fierce expressions on public affairs, these were usually received in silence; and the matter thus raised up for assent or controversy was allowed to drop."

Procter thus describes Lamb's conversational manner: "His speech was brief and pithy; not too often humorous; never sententious nor didactic. Although he sometimes talked whilst walking up and down the room, (at which time he seldom looked at the person with whom he was talking), he very often spoke as if impelled by the necessity of speaking—suddenly, precipitately. If he could have spoken very easily he might possibly have uttered long sentences, expositions, or orations; such as some of his friends indulged in, to the utter confusion of their hearers. But he knew the value of silence; and he knew that even truth may be damaged by too many words. When he did speak his words had a flavour in them beyond any that I have heard elsewhere. His conversation dwelt upon persons or things within his own recollection, or it opened (with a startling doubt, or a question, or a piece of quaint humour) the great circle of thought.

"In temper he was quick, but easily appeased. He never affected that exemption from sensibility, which has sometimes been mistaken for philosophy; and has conferred reputation upon little men. In a word, he exhibited his emotions in a fine, simple, natural manner. Contrary to the usual habits of wits, no retort or reply by Lamb, however smart in character, ever gave pain. . . . Lamb's dissent was very intelligible, but never superfluously demonstrative: often, indeed, expressed by his countenance only: sometimes merely by silence."

Procter also remarks, "It was curious to observe the gradations in Lamb's manner to his various guests; although it was courteous to all. With Hazlitt he talked as though they met the subject in discussion on equal terms; with Leigh Hunt he exchanged repartees; to Wordsworth he was almost respectful; with Coleridge he was sometimes jocose, sometimes deferring; with Martin Burney fraternally familiar; with Manning affectionate; with Godwin merely courteous, or if friendly, then in a minor degree." To this analysis it is necessary only to add that Lamb is said once to have pulled Wordsworth's nose, and at

Haydon's to have addressed him as "You rascally old Lake poet."

Bryan Waller Procter (Barry Cornwall) tells us in his *Autobiographical Fragment* that he first met Lamb in 1817 at Hunt's house. In that year the author of *Charles Lamb: A Memoir*, to which all who write of Lamb are so much indebted, was thirty. He was in business as a solicitor; was living a very gay life as a man about town, keeping his hunter and taking lessons from Tom Cribb; and contributing to the *Literary Gazette*. There is no doubt but that intercourse with Lamb, who seems to have liked him extremely, led to his thinking more seriously of poetry, and we may attribute the composition of his *Dramatic Scenes* largely to Lamb's influence. Lamb admired them a little perhaps beyond their deserts, possibly from this paternal association; he said that they were worthy of a place in his *Specimens*. It was not, however, until *Marcian Colonna*, 1820, and *A Sicilian Story*, 1821, were published, that Procter took his place as one of the poets of the day. But his best work is in *English Songs*.

Procter tells us that on the evening at Hunt's when he first met Lamb he made the acquaintance also of Hazlitt, Walter Coulson and Thomas Love Peacock. I can find no other evidence that Lamb and Peacock ever met; but they certainly ought to have known each other, especially after 1819, when Peacock entered the Examiner's Office of the East India House. Sir Algernon West in his *Reminiscences* attributes to Lamb—I think wrongly—a condensed version of Peacock's lines, as given by his granddaughter in her memoir of him in Bentley's edition, on the India House routine:—

From ten to eleven, ate a breakfast for seven;  
 From eleven to noon, to begin 'twas too soon;  
 From twelve to one, asked "What's to be done?"  
 From one to two, found nothing to do;  
 From two to three, began to foresee  
 That from three to four would be a d——d bore.<sup>1</sup>

The author of *Headlong Hall* should have found much in common with the author of *Elia*; but I am not aware that he did so. Perhaps Peacock's friend Shelley came between; for, as

<sup>1</sup> There is a story, but I cannot give a reference for it, of Lamb and Peacock sitting opposite each other at a public dinner. Between them was a salad bowl, on the top of which was a hard-boiled egg. "What kind of egg is that?" Peacock asked. "The kind of egg," replied Lamb, "that a drunken peacock would lay."



we are about to see, Shelley was one of Lamb's "imperfect sympathies,"—or rather antipathies.

To return to Lamb's evening parties, there is more stuff of the intellect in Hazlitt's essay "On the Conversation of Authors" in *The Plain Speaker*, a description which, for the most part, however, belongs to an earlier period than that which we have now reached—about 1814 I think—but which may be fittingly taken here. "But when a set of adepts, of *illuminati*, get about a question, it is worth while to hear them talk. They may snarl and quarrel over it, like dogs; but they pick it bare to the bone, they masticate it thoroughly. This was the case formerly at L[amb]'s—where we used to have many lively skirmishes at their Thursday evening parties. I doubt whether the Small-coal man's musical parties could exceed them. Oh! for the pen of John Bunce to consecrate a *petit souvenir* to their memory!—

"There was L—— himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun, and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen, laughing, hair-brained vein of home-felt truth! What choice venom! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we got into the heart of controversy! How we picked out the marrow of authors! 'And, in our flowing cups, many a good name and true was freshly remembered.' Recollect (most sage and critical reader) that in all this I was but a guest! Need I go over the names? They were but the old everlasting set—Milton and Shakspeare, Pope and Dryden, Steele and Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, the Cartoons at Hampton Court, and all those things that, having once been, must ever be. The Scotch Novels had not then been heard of: so we said nothing about them. In general, we were hard upon the moderns. The author of the *Rambler* was only tolerated in Boswell's *Life* of him; and it was as much as any one could do to edge in a word for *Junius*. L—— could not bear *Gil Blas*. This was a fault. I remember the greatest triumph

I ever had was in persuading him, after some years' difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollett. On one occasion, he was for making out a list of persons famous in history that one would wish to see again—at the head of whom were Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus—but we black-balled most of his list! But with what a gusto would he describe his favourite authors, Donne, or Sir Philip Sidney, and call their most crabbed passages *delicious*! He tried them on his palate as epicures taste olives, and his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue. With what discrimination he hinted a defect in what he admired most—as in saying that the display of the sumptuous banquet in *Paradise Regained* was not in true keeping, as the simplest fare was all that was necessary to tempt the extremity of hunger—and stating that Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* were too much like married people. He has furnished many a text for C[oleridge] to preach upon. There was no fuss or cant about him: nor were his sweets or his sour sours ever diluted with one particle of affectation.

“I cannot say that the party at L——’s were all of one description. There were honorary members, lay-brothers. Wit and good fellowship was the motto inscribed over the door. When a stranger came in, it was not asked, ‘Has he written anything?’—we were above that pedantry; but we waited to see what he could do. If he could take a hand at piquet, he was welcome to sit down. If a person liked anything, if he took snuff heartily, it was sufficient. He would understand, by analogy, the pungency of other things besides Irish blackguard or Scotch rappee. A character was good anywhere, in a room or on paper. But we abhorred insipidity, affectation, and fine gentlemen. There was one of our party who never failed to mark ‘two for his Nob’ at cribbage, and he was thought no mean person. This was Ned P[hillips], and a better fellow in his way breathes not. There was ——, who asserted some incredible matter of fact as a likely paradox, and settled all controversies by an *ipse dixit*, a *fiat* of his will, hammering out many a hard theory on the anvil of his brain—the Baron Munchausen of politics and practical philosophy:—there was Captain B[urney], who had you at an advantage by never understanding you:—there was Jem White, the Author of *Falstaff’s Letters*, who the other day left this dull world to go in search of more kindred spirits, ‘turning like the latter end of a lover’s lute:’—

there was A[yrton], who sometimes dropped in, the Will Honeycomb of our set—and Mrs. R[eynolds], who being of a quiet turn, loved to hear a noisy debate. An utterly uninformed person might have supposed this a scene of vulgar confusion and uproar. While the most critical question was pending, while the most difficult problem in philosophy was solving, P—— cried out, ‘That’s game,’ and M. B. muttered a quotation over the last remains of a veal-pie at a side table.”

Summing up the character of the best talker he had known, Hazlitt says, in the same essay: “Wordsworth sometimes talks like a man inspired on subjects of poetry (his own out of the question)—Coleridge well on every subject, and Godwin on none. To finish this subject—Mrs. M[ontagu]’s conversation is as fine-cut as her features, and I like to sit in the room with that sort of coronet face. What she says leaves a flavour, like fine green tea. H[unt]’s is like champagne, and N[orthcote]’s like anchovy sandwiches. H[aydon]’s is like a game at trap-ball: L——’s like snap-dragon: and my own (if I do not mistake the matter) is not very much unlike a game at nine-pins!”

Hazlitt has left not only this description of a Thursday evening, but also a report of one of the informal discussions. He suggests that it occurred very early in his acquaintance with Lamb; but I fancy his memory betrayed him, and the real time was about 1814. The subject, suggested by Lamb, was “Persons One would Wish to Have Seen.”

“On the question being started, A[yrton] said, ‘I suppose the two first persons you would choose to see would be the two greatest names in English literature, Sir Isaac Newton and Mr. Locke?’ In this A——, as usual, reckoned without his host. Every one burst out a-laughing at the expression of Lamb’s face, in which impatience was restrained by courtesy. ‘Yes, the greatest names, he stammered out hastily, ‘but they were not persons—not persons.’—‘Not persons?’ said A——, looking wise and foolish at the same time, afraid his triumph might be premature. ‘That is,’ rejoined Lamb, ‘not characters, you know. By Mr. Locke and Sir Isaac Newton you mean the “Essay on the Human Understanding” and the “Principia,” which we have to this day. Beyond their contents there is nothing personally interesting in the men. But what we want to see any one *bodily* for, is when there is something peculiar, striking in the individuals, more than



we can learn from their writings, and yet are curious to know. I dare say Locke and Newton were very like Kneller's portraits of them. But who could paint Shakspeare?'—'Ay,' retorted A——, 'there it is; then I suppose you would prefer seeing him and Milton instead?'—'No,' said Lamb, 'neither. I have seen so much of Shakspeare on the stage and on book-stalls, in frontispieces and on mantel-pieces, that I am quite tired of the everlasting repetition: and as to Milton's face, the impressions that have come down to us of it I do not like; it is too starched and puritanical; and I should be afraid of losing some of the manna of his poetry in the leaven of his countenance and the precisian's band and gown.'—'I shall guess no more,' said A——. 'Who is it, then, you would like to see "in his habit as he lived," if you had your choice of the whole range of English literature?'

"Lamb then named Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, as the two worthies whom he should feel the greatest pleasure to encounter on the floor of his apartment in their nightgown and slippers, and to exchange friendly greeting with them. At this A—— laughed outright, and conceived Lamb was jesting with him; but as no one followed his example, he thought there might be something in it, and waited for an explanation in a state of whimsical suspense. Lamb then . . . went on as follows:—'The reason why I pitch upon these two authors is, that their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages. They resemble the soothsayers of old, who dealt in dark hints and doubtful oracles; and I should like to ask them the meaning of what no mortal but themselves, I should suppose, can fathom. There is Dr. Johnson: I have no curiosity, no strange uncertainty about him; he and Boswell together have pretty well let me into the secret of what passed through his mind. He and other writers like him are sufficiently explicit: my friends, whose repose I should be tempted to disturb (were it in my power), are implicit, inextricable, inscrutable. When I look at that obscure but gorgeous prose composition, the "Urn-burial," I seem to myself to look into a deep abyss, at the bottom of which are hid pearls and rich treasure; or it is like a stately labyrinth of doubt and withering speculation, and I would invoke the spirit of the author to lead me through it. Besides, who would not be curious to see the lineaments of a man who, having himself been twice married,

wished that mankind were propagated like trees! As to Fulke Greville, he is like nothing but one of his own "Prologues spoken by the ghost of an old king of Ormus," a truly formidable and inviting personage: his style is apocalyptic, cabalistical, a knot worthy of such an apparition to untie; and for the unravelling a passage or two, I would stand the brunt of an encounter with so portentous a commentator!—

"I am afraid, in that case," said A——, "that if the mystery were once cleared up, the merit might be lost;"—and turning to me, whispered a friendly apprehension, that while Lamb continued to admire these old crabbed authors, he would never become a popular writer. Dr. Donne was mentioned as a writer of the same period, with a very interesting countenance, whose history was singular, and whose meaning was often quite as *uncomeatable*, without a personal citation from the dead, as that of any of his contemporaries. . . .

"Some one then inquired of Lamb if we could not see from the window the Temple walk in which Chaucer used to take his exercise; and on his name being put to the vote, I was pleased to find that there was a general sensation in his favour in all but A——, who said something about the ruggedness of the metre, and even objected to the quaintness of the orthography. I was vexed at this superficial gloss, pertinaciously reducing everything to its own trite level, and asked 'if he did not think it would be worth while to scan the eye that had first greeted the Muse in that dim twilight and early dawn of English literature; to see the head round which the visions of fancy must have played like gleams of inspiration or a sudden glory; to watch those lips that "lisped in numbers, for the numbers came"—as by a miracle, or as if the dumb should speak? Nor was it alone that he had been the first to tune his native tongue (however imperfectly to modern ears); but he was himself a noble, manly character, standing before his age and striving to advance it; a pleasant humorist withal, who has not only handed down to us the living manners of his time, but had, no doubt, store of curious and quaint devices, and would make as hearty a companion as mine host of the Tabard. His interview with Petrarch is fraught with interest. Yet I would rather have seen Chaucer in company with the author of the "Decameron," and have heard them exchange their best stories together—the "Squire's Tale" against

the "Story of the Falcon," the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" against the "Adventures of Friar Albert." How fine to see the high mysterious brow which learning then wore, relieved by the gay, familiar tone of men of the world, and by the courtesies of genius! Surely, the thoughts and feelings which passed through the minds of these great revivers of learning, these Cadmuses who sowed the teeth of letters, must have stamped an expression on their features as different from the moderns as their books, and well worth the perusal. Dante,' I continued, 'is as interesting a person as his own Ugolino, one whose lineaments curiosity would as eagerly devour in order to penetrate his spirit, and the only one of the Italian poets I should care much to see. There is a fine portrait of Ariosto by no less a hand than Titian's; light, Moorish, spirited, but not answering our idea. The same artist's large colossal profile of Peter Aretine is the only likeness of the kind that has the effect of conversing with "the mighty dead;" and this is truly spectral, ghastly, necromantic.'

"Lamb put it to me if I should like to see Spenser as well as Chaucer; and I answered, without hesitation, 'No; for that his beauties were ideal, visionary, not palpable or personal, and therefore connected with less curiosity about the man. His poetry was the essence of romance, a very halo round the bright orb of fancy; and the bringing in the individual might dissolve the charm. No tones of voice could come up to the mellifluous cadence of his verse; no form but of a winged angel could vie with the airy shapes he has described. He was (to my apprehension) rather a "creature of the element, that lived in the rainbow and played in the plighted clouds," than an ordinary mortal. Or if he did appear, I should wish it to be as a mere vision, like one of his own pageants, and that he should pass by unquestioned like a dream or sound—

—'That was Arion crown'd:  
So went he playing on the wat'ry plain.'

"Captain Burney muttered something about Columbus, and Martin Burney hinted at the Wandering Jew; but the last was set aside as spurious, and the first made over to the New World.

"'I should like,' said Mrs. Reynolds, 'to have seen Pope talk with Patty Blount; and I *have* seen Goldsmith.' Every one turned round to look at Mrs. Reynolds, as if by so doing they could get a sight at Goldsmith. . . .



“‘I thought,’ said A——, turning short round upon Lamb, ‘that you of the Lake School did not like Pope?’—‘Not like Pope! My dear sir, you must be under a mistake—I can read him over and over for ever!’—‘Why, certainly, the “Essay on Man” must be allowed to be a masterpiece.’—‘It may be so, but I seldom look into it.’—‘Oh! then it’s his Satires you admire?’—‘No, not his Satires, but his friendly Epistles and his compliments.’—‘Compliments! I did not know he ever made any.’—‘The finest,’ said Lamb, ‘that were ever paid by the wit of man. Each of them is worth an estate for life—nay, is an immortality. There is that superb one to Lord Cornbury :

Despise low joys, low gains ;  
 Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains ;  
 Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains.’

Was there ever more artful insinuation of idolatrous praise? And then that noble apotheosis of his friend Lord Mansfield (however little deserved), when, speaking of the House of Lords, he adds—

‘Conspicuous scene! another yet is nigh,  
 (More silent far) where kings and poets lie ;  
 Where Murray (long enough his country’s pride)  
 Shall be no more than Tully or than Hyde!’

And with what a fine turn of indignant flattery he addresses Lord Bolingbroke—

‘Why rail they then, if but one wreath of mine,  
 Oh! all-accomplish’d St. John, deck thy shrine?’

Or turn,’ continued Lamb, with a slight hectic on his cheek and his eye glistening, ‘to his list of early friends :

‘But why then publish? Granville the polite,  
 And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write ;  
 Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,  
 And Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays :  
 The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read,  
 Ev’n mitred Rochester would nod the head ;  
 And St. John’s self (great Dryden’s friend before)  
 Received with open arms one poet more.  
 Happy my studies, if by these approved !  
 Happier their author, if by these beloved !  
 From these the world will judge of men and books,  
 Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks.’

Here his voice totally failed him, and throwing down the book, he said, ‘Do you think I would not wish to have been friends with such a man as this?’

“ ‘What say you to Dryden?’—‘He rather made a show of himself, and courted popularity in that lowest temple of fame, a coffee-shop, so as in some measure to vulgarise one’s idea of him. Pope, on the contrary, reached the very *beau idéal* of what a poet’s life should be; and his fame while living seemed to be an emanation from that which was to circle his name after death. He was so far enviable (and one would feel proud to have witnessed the rare spectacle in him) that he was almost the only poet and man of genius who met with his reward on this side of the tomb, who realised in friends, fortune, the esteem of the world, the most sanguine hopes of a youthful ambition, and who found that sort of patronage from the great during his lifetime which they would be thought anxious to bestow upon him after his death. Read Gay’s verses to him on his supposed return from Greece, after his translation of Homer was finished, and say if you would not gladly join the bright procession that welcomed him home, or see it once more land at Whitehall stairs.’—‘Still,’ said Mrs. Reynolds, ‘I would rather have seen him talking with Patty Blount, or riding by in a coronet-coach with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu!’

“Erasmus Phillips, who was deep in a game of piquet at the other end of the room, whispered to Martin Burney to ask if Junius would not be a fit person to invoke from the dead. ‘Yes,’ said Lamb, ‘provided he would agree to lay aside his mask.’

“We were now at a stand for a short time, when Fielding was mentioned as a candidate: only one, however, seconded the proposition. ‘Richardson?’—‘By all means, but only to look at him through the glass-door of his back-shop, hard at work upon one of his novels (the most extraordinary contrast that ever was presented between an author and his works); not to let him come behind his counter, lest he should want you to turn customer, or to go upstairs with him, lest he should offer to read the first manuscript of “Sir Charles Grandison,” which was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes octavo, or get out the letters of his female correspondents, to prove that “Joseph Andrews” was low.’

“There was but one statesman in the whole of English history that any one expressed the least desire to see—Oliver Cromwell, with his fine, frank, rough, pimply face, and wily policy; and one enthusiast, John Bunyan, the immortal author of the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress.’ It seemed that if he came into the room, dreams would follow him, and that each person would nod under his golden cloud,

‘nigh-sphered in heaven,’ a canopy as strange and stately as any in Homer.

“Of all persons near our own time, Garrick’s name was received with the greatest enthusiasm, who was proposed by Barron Field. He presently superseded both Hogarth and Handel, who had been talked of, but then it was on condition that he should act in tragedy and comedy, in the play and the farce, ‘Lear’ and ‘Wildair’ and ‘Abel Drugger.’ What a *sight for sore eyes* that would be! . . .

“We were interrupted . . . by a grumbler in a corner, who declared it was a shame to make all this rout about a mere player and farce-writer, to the neglect and exclusion of the fine old dramatists, the contemporaries and rivals of Shakspeare. Lamb said he had anticipated this objection when he had named the author of ‘Mustapha’ and ‘Alaham ;’ and, out of caprice, insisted upon keeping him to represent the set, in preference to the wild, hare-brained enthusiast, Kit Marlowe ; to the sexton of St. Ann’s, Webster, with his melancholy yew-trees and death’s-heads ; to Decker, who was but a garrulous proser ; to the voluminous Heywood ; and even to Beaumont and Fletcher, whom we might offend by complimenting the wrong author on their joint productions. Lord Brooke, on the contrary, stood quite by himself, or, in Cowley’s words, was ‘a vast species alone.’ Some one hinted at the circumstance of his being a lord, which rather startled Lamb, but he said a *ghost* would perhaps dispense with strict etiquette, on being regularly addressed by his title. Ben Jonson divided our suffrages pretty equally. Some were afraid he would begin to traduce Shakspeare, who was not present to defend himself. ‘If he grows disagreeable,’ it was whispered aloud, ‘there is Godwin can match him.’ At length his romantic visit to Drummond of Hawthornden was mentioned, and turned the scale in his favour.

“Lamb inquired if there was any one that was hanged that I would choose to mention. And I answered, ‘Eugene Aram.’ . . .

“‘But shall we have nothing to say?’ interrogated G. J——, ‘to the “Legend of Good Women”?’—‘Name, name, Mr. J——, cried Hunt in a boisterous tone of friendly exultation, ‘name as many as you please, without reserve or fear of molestation!’ J—— was perplexed between so many amiable recollections, that the name of the lady of his choice expired in a pensive whiff of



his pipe; and Lamb impatiently declared for the Duchess of Newcastle. Mrs. Hutchinson was no sooner mentioned, than she carried the day from the Duchess. We were the less solicitous on this subject of filling up the posthumous lists of Good Women, as there was already one in the room as good, as sensible, and in all respects as exemplary as the best of them could be for their lives! 'I should like vastly to have seen Ninon de l'Enclos,' said that incomparable person [meaning Mary Lamb]; and this immediately put us in mind that we had neglected to pay honour due to our friends on the other side of the Channel: Voltaire, the patriarch of levity, and Rousseau, the father of sentiment; Montaigne and Rabelais (great in wisdom and in wit); Molière and that illustrious group that are collected round him (in the print of that subject) to hear him read his comedy of the 'Tartuffe' at the house of Ninon; Racine, La Fontaine, Rochefoucauld, St. Evremont, &c.

"'There is one person,' said a shrill, querulous voice, 'I would rather see than all these—Don Quixote!'

"'Come, come!' said Hunt; 'I thought we should have no heroes, real or fabulous. What say you, Mr. Lamb? Are you for eking out your shadowy list with such names as Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Tamerlane, or Ghengis Khan?'—'Excuse me,' said Lamb; 'on the subject of characters in active life, plotters and disturbers of the world, I have a crotchet of my own, which I beg leave to reserve.'—'No, no! come out with your worthies!'—'What do you think of Guy Fawkes and Judas Iscariot?' Hunt turned an eye upon him like a wild Indian, but cordial and full of smothered glee. 'Your most exquisite reason!' was echoed on all sides; and A—— thought that Lamb had now fairly entangled himself. 'Why, I cannot but think,' retorted he of the wistful countenance, 'that Guy Fawkes, that poor, fluttering annual scarecrow of straw and rags, is an ill-used gentleman. I would give something to see him sitting pale and emaciated, surrounded by his matches and his barrels of gunpowder, and expecting the moment that was to transport him to Paradise for his heroic self-devotion; but if I say any more, there is that fellow Godwin will make something of it. And as to Judas Iscariot, my reason is different. I would fain see the face of him who, having dipped his hand in the same dish with the Son of Man, could afterwards betray Him. I have no conception of

such a thing ; nor have I ever seen any picture (not even Leonardo's very fine one) that gave me the least idea of it.'—' You have said enough, Mr. Lamb, to justify your choice.'

“ ‘ Oh ! ever right, Menenius,—ever right ! ’

“ ‘ There is only one other person I can ever think of after this,’ continued Lamb ; but without mentioning a name that once put on a semblance of mortality. ‘ If Shakspeare was to come into the room, we should all rise up to meet him ; but if that person was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment ! ’ ”

Robinson tells us above that Lamb had quarrelled with Hazlitt. From what we know of the matter it would be more correct to say that Hazlitt had quarrelled with Lamb, his cause of complaint being that on one of Wordsworth's visits to town Hazlitt was not included in Lamb's invitations to meet the poet. Lamb was acting rather upon Wordsworth's wishes than his own, but Wordsworth probably had sufficient reason, into which it is not necessary to enter here. It is enough to say that Hazlitt, as he grew older, did not grow more tolerant or less suspicious, and his friendship became more and more difficult to retain. That his feeling against Lamb was, however, tempered with justice, we know from the dedication of his *Characters of Shakspeare's Plays*, published in 1817 :—

To

CHARLES LAMB, ESQ.,

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED AS A MARK OF

OLD FRIENDSHIP

AND LASTING ESTEEM

BY THE AUTHOR.

In 1820 there are signs that Hazlitt was again resentful. This new period of soreness against Lamb lasted until the end of 1823, when they were fully reconciled.

The Lambs moved to Great Russell Street in 1817, driven from the Temple by the state of their rooms. In a letter to the Kenneys is the suggestion that the departure was decided upon suddenly in October, while they were in their Dalston retreat.

The other news in the letter is that Manning has returned. “ He expressed some mortifications at not finding Mrs. Kenney in England. He looks a good deal sunburnt, and is got a little reserved, but I hope it will wear off.” Manning had come back

to England a disappointed man, and thenceforward was to become more and more peculiar and anti-social. His adventures in the East, though curious, had yielded very little result. From 1807 to 1810 his headquarters had been the East India Company's factory at Canton, where he practised as a doctor and occasionally made journeys into the interior of the country. In 1810 he was at Calcutta, whence he succeeded in accomplishing the journey to Lhasa, the sacred city in the storming of which so many other explorers failed. Manning was the first Englishman to enter it, and he remained there for some months before he was conveyed back to India. The story will be found in his journal, published in 1876, with a memoir, by the Royal Geographical Society. Manning then returned to Canton, and after joining Lord Amherst's mission to Peking as interpreter, he sailed in 1816 for England. The vessel was wrecked near Sunda in February, 1817, and in the following July the passengers were taken to St. Helena, where Manning again met Napoleon and reminded him of their previous meeting, in 1803, when Manning had been granted the only passport given to an Englishman in Paris. In the autumn of 1817 he once more reappeared in England, the richer by some curious Asiatic lore and a long and luxuriant beard to which he was devotedly attached.

Barry Cornwall, who first met Manning at this time, writes as follows in his *Memoir of Lamb*: "When the Chinese traveller returned to London, he was very often a guest at Lamb's residence. I have repeatedly met him there. His countenance was that of an intelligent, steady, almost serious man. His journey to the celestial empire had not been unfruitful of good; his talk at all times being full of curious information, including much anecdote, and some (not common) speculations on men and things. When he returned, he brought with him a native of China, whom he took one evening to a ball in London; where the foreigner from Shanghai, or Peking, enquired with much naïvete as to the amount of money which his host had given to the dancers for their evening's performance, and was persuaded with difficulty that their exertions were entirely gratuitous. Manning had a curious habit of bringing with him (in his waistcoat pocket) some pods of the red pepper, whenever he expected to partake of a meal. His original intention (as I understood) when he set out for China, was to frame and publish a Chinese and English



dictionary; yet—although he brought over much material for the purpose—his purpose was never carried into effect.” Now and again we have a further glimpse of Manning; but of the remainder of his life very little is known. He died in 1840. No portrait of him exists.

In October came the move. The Lambs left the Temple, which except for slight intervals had been their home all their lives, never to return to it. They moved to Great Russell Street, to rooms on the first floor, over Mr. Owen, an ironmonger, the tenant both of No. 21 and 20, the corner house and the house next to it. The numbering of the street is still the same, but the houses have been rebuilt and altered, and what was Mr. Owen’s is now two fruit shops. Lamb gives his address as No. 20, but it is definitely stated by Barry Cornwall that they lived over the corner shop—which until lately was a ham and beef shop and was once Will’s Coffee House.<sup>1</sup> According to George Daniel, the antiquary, Lamb’s Russell Street rooms were reached by a narrow winding pair of stairs. Great Russell Street then extended from Covent Garden to Brydges Street (now Catherine Street), where it became Little Russell Street. It is now all Russell Street from Covent Garden to Drury Lane. At No. 19 was Barker’s, the second-hand bookseller, where Lamb bought the folio Beaumont and Fletcher which is mentioned in the essay “Old China” in Chapter XV. and is now in the British Museum. Covent Garden Theatre was at the back of them, Drury Lane diagonally just across the way.

Writing to Dorothy Wordsworth on November 21st, 1817, Lamb says: “Here we are, transplanted from our native soil. I thought we never could have been torn up from the Temple. Indeed it was an ugly wrench, but like a tooth now ’tis out and I am easy. We never can strike root so deep in any other ground. This, where we are, is a light bit of gardener’s mold, and if they take us up from it, it will cost no blood and groans like mandrakes pull’d up. We are in the individual spot I like best in all this great city. The theatres with all [their noises. Covent Garden] dearer to me than any gardens of Alcinous, where we are morally sure of the earliest peas and ’sparagus. Bow Street, where the thieves are examined, within a few yards of us. Mary had not

<sup>1</sup> Crabb Robinson writes to his brother Thomas on December 23rd of this year: “Let his Turkey be directed minutely to Mr. Lamb at Mr. Owen’s, No. 20 and 21, Great Russell Street, Drury Lane.”

been here four and twenty hours before she saw a Thief. She sits at the window working, and casually throwing out her eyes, she sees a concourse of people coming this way, with a constable to conduct the solemnity. These little incidents agreeably diversify a female life." But the best thing in the letter is the reference to De Quincey's marriage—at least I think Lamb must mean De Quincey: "It is a delicate subject, but is Mr. \* \* \* really married? and has he found a gargle to his mind? O how funny he did talk to me about her, in terms of such mild quiet whispering speculative profligacy. But did the animalcule and she crawl over the rubric together, or did they not?"

In the same letter, which is a double one, Mary Lamb says: "Charles has had all his Hogarths bound in a book, they were sent home yesterday, and now that I have them altogether and perceive the advantage of peeping close at them through my spectacles I am reconciled to the loss of them hanging round the room, which has been a great mortification to me—in vain I tried to console myself with looking at our new chairs and carpets, for we have got new chairs, and carpets covering all over our two sitting rooms."

The letter continuing tells us that the 1817 holiday was spent at Brighton: at least I think it impossible that by "last summer" Mary Lamb could mean that of 1816, because we know that the full month was then spent at Calne and thereabouts: "I missed my old friends and could not be comforted—then I would resolve to learn to look out of the window, a habit I never could attain in my life, and I have given it up as a thing quite impracticable—yet when I was at Brighton last summer the first week I never took my eyes off from the sea, not even to look in a book. I had not seen the sea for sixteen years. Mrs. Morgan, who was with us, kept her liking and continued her seat in the window till the very last, while Charles and I played truant and wandered among the hills, which we magnified into little mountains and *almost as good as* Westmoreland scenery—certainly we made discoveries of many pleasant walks which few of the Brighton visitors have ever dreamed of—for, like as is the case in the neighbourhood of London, after the first two or three miles we were sure to find ourselves in a perfect solitude. I hope we shall meet before the walking faculties of either of us fail. You say you can walk fifteen miles with ease, that is exactly my stint, and more fatigues me."

On December 10th Lamb writes to John Payne Collier asking him to interest himself in Coleridge's new plan to lecture on Shakespeare and Poetry. Coleridge is in bad health and "unless something is done to lighten his mind he will soon be reduced to his extremities. . . . He projects a new course, not of physic, nor of metaphysic, nor a new course of life, but a new course of lectures on Shakspeare and Poetry. There is no man better qualified (always excepting number one); but I am pre-engaged for a series of dissertations on India and India-pendence, to be completed at the expense of the Company, in I know not (yet) how many volumes foolscap folio. I am busy getting up my Hindoo mythology; and for the purpose I am once more enduring Southey's curse. To be serious, Coleridge's state and affairs make me so; and there are particular reasons just now, and have been any time for the last twenty years, why he should succeed." To these lectures we shall come in 1818.

On December 27th Robinson has the following entry:—

"December 27th:—I called on Lamb, and met Wordsworth with him; I afterwards returned to Lamb's. Dined at Monkhouse's. The party was small—Mr. and Mrs. Wordsworth and Miss Hutchinson, Coleridge and his son Hartley, and Mr. Tillbrook. After dinner Charles Lamb and his son [a slip of the pen for sister] joined the party." Tillbrook, of Cambridge, a friend of Wordsworth, was tutor to Clarkson's son.

On the next night Lamb went to another party and made it historic—the party at Haydon's. Haydon was then living at Lisson Grove. The guests were Wordsworth, Monkhouse, Lamb, Keats, Ritchie, Landseer, and the unfortunate Comptroller of Stamps, a Mr. Kingston. This is Haydon's account of the evening: "On December 28th the immortal dinner came off in my painting-room, with Jerusalem towering up behind us as a background. Wordsworth was in fine cue, and we had a glorious set-to,—on Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and Virgil. Lamb got exceedingly merry and exquisitely witty; and his fun in the midst of Wordsworth's solemn intonations of oratory was like the sarcasm and wit of the fool in the intervals of Lear's passion. He made a speech and voted me absent, and made them drink my health. 'Now,' said Lamb, 'you old lake poet, you rascally poet, why do you call Voltaire dull?' We all defended Wordsworth, and affirmed there was a state of mind when Voltaire would be



dull. 'Well,' said Lamb, 'here's Voltaire—the Messiah of the French nation, and a very proper one too.'

"He then, in a strain of humour beyond description, abused me for putting Newton's head into my picture,—'a fellow,' said he, 'who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle.' And then he and Keats agreed he had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours. It was impossible to resist him, and we all drank 'Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics.' It was delightful to see the good-humour of Wordsworth in giving in to all our frolics without affectation and laughing as heartily as the best of us.

"By this time other friends joined, amongst them poor Ritchie who was going to penetrate by Fezzan to Timbuctoo. I introduced him to all as 'a gentleman going to Africa.' Lamb seemed to take no notice; but all of a sudden he roared out, 'Which is the gentleman we are going to lose?' We then drank the victim's health, in which Ritchie joined.

"In the morning of this delightful day, a gentleman, a perfect stranger, had called on me. He said he knew my friends, had an enthusiasm for Wordsworth and begged I would procure him the happiness of an introduction. He told me he was a comptroller of stamps, and often had correspondence with the poet. I thought it a liberty; but still, as he seemed a gentleman, I told him he might come.

"When we retired to tea we found the comptroller. In introducing him to Wordsworth I forgot to say who he was. After a little time the comptroller looked down, looked up and said to Wordsworth, 'Don't you think, sir, Milton was a great genius?' Keats looked at me, Wordsworth looked at the comptroller. Lamb who was dozing by the fire turned round and said, 'Pray, sir, did you say Milton was a great genius?' 'No, sir; I asked Mr. Wordsworth if he were not.' 'Oh,' said Lamb, 'then you are a silly fellow.' 'Charles! my dear Charles!' said Wordsworth; but Lamb, perfectly innocent of the confusion he had created, was off again by the fire.

"After an awful pause the comptroller said, 'Don't you think Newton a great genius?' I could not stand it any longer. Keats put his head into my books. Ritchie squeezed in a laugh. Wordsworth seemed asking himself, 'Who is this?' Lamb got up, and taking a candle, said, 'Sir, will you allow me to look at

your phrenological development?' He then turned his back on the poor man, and at every question of the comptroller he chaunted—

'Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John  
Went to bed with his breeches on.'

The man in office, finding Wordsworth did not know who he was, said in a spasmodic and half-chuckling anticipation of assured victory, 'I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr. Wordsworth.' 'With me, sir?' said Wordsworth, 'not that I remember.' 'Don't you, sir? I am a comptroller of stamps.' There was a dead silence;—the comptroller evidently thinking that was enough. While we were waiting for Wordsworth's reply, Lamb sung out

'Hey diddle diddle,  
The cat and the fiddle.'

'My dear Charles!' said Wordsworth,—

'Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John,'

chaunted Lamb, and then rising, exclaimed, 'Do let me have another look at that gentleman's organs.' Keats and I hurried Lamb into the painting-room, shut the door and gave way to inextinguishable laughter. Monkhouse followed and tried to get Lamb away. We went back, but the comptroller was irreconcilable. We soothed and smiled and asked him to supper. He stayed, though his dignity was sorely affected. However, being a good-natured man, we parted all in good humour, and no ill effects followed.

"All the while, until Monkhouse succeeded, we could hear Lamb struggling in the painting-room and calling at intervals, 'Who is that fellow? Allow me to see his organs once more.'

"It was indeed an immortal evening. Wordsworth's fine intonation as he quoted Milton and Virgil, Keats's eager inspired look, Lamb's quaint sparkle of lambent humour, so speeded the stream of conversation, that in my life I never passed a more delightful time. All our fun was within bounds. Not a word passed that an apostle might not have listened to. It was a night worthy of the Elizabethan age, and my solemn Jerusalem flashing up by the flame of the fire, with Christ hanging over us like a vision, all made up a picture which will long glow upon—

'that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude.'

Keats made Ritchie promise he would carry his *Endymion* to the great desert of Sahara and fling it in the midst.

“Poor Ritchie went to Africa, and died, as Lamb foresaw, in 1819. Keats died in 1821, at Rome. C. Lamb is gone, joking to the last. Monkhouse is dead, and Wordsworth and I are the only two now living (1841) of that glorious party.”

Haydon's great night was one of the few occasions on which Lamb and Keats met. Mrs. Cowden Clarke, in a description of the musical evenings at Vincent Novello's, mentions “Keats, with his picturesque head, leaning against the instruments, one foot raised on his knee and smoothed beneath his hands; Leigh Hunt, with his jet-black hair and expressive mouth; Shelley, with his poet's eyes and brown curls; and Lamb with his spare figure and earnest face;” but I doubt if all this company was ever together. Lamb told Bernard Barton some years later that he had met Shelley but once, and that very likely was at Godwin's.

Lamb admired Keats's poetry, as we know by his review of “*St. Agnes' Eve*” in the *New Times*, and by the statement to Robinson that he thought it “next to Wordsworth;” but the man himself cannot greatly have attracted him, nor was Keats drawn to Lamb. He mentions in one of his letters meeting Lamb at Novello's and being devastated and excruciated by bad and repeated puns. From what we know of Lamb we can see how likely he would be to break in indecorously upon what he considered a period of too intense worship of sound, just as he could not resist the impulse to leaven the rigours of a funeral. Writing to his brother George, on September 17th, 1819, Keats remarks, “The thought of your little girl puts me in mind of a thing I heard Mr. Lamb say. A child in arms was passing by his chair towards the mother in the nurse's arms. Lamb took hold of the long clothes, saying, ‘Where, God bless me, where does it leave off!’”<sup>1</sup>

Shelley we know Lamb actively to have disliked; he objected to his voice and he ignored all his poetry (“thin sown with aught of profit or delight” he quoted of it) except “*Rosalind and Helen*,” and the lines to a reviewer, which appealed to him by their humorous or unexpected turn. On the other hand Shelley admired Lamb deeply. He wrote to Leigh Hunt in 1819:

<sup>1</sup>In earlier editions of this work I stated that Keats in a letter to Bailey mentions calling upon Lamb. The date is conjecturally 1817, and Keats says, “Yesterday I called at Lamb's. St. Jane looked very flushed when I first looked in, but was much better before I left.” It has been held that by St. Jane Keats meant Mary Lamb. But Major Butterworth has supplied a more reasonable theory, to the effect that Lamb's meant Lamb's Conduit St., and that St. Jane was Jane Reynolds, sister of Keats's friend, John Hamilton Reynolds, and later the wife of



“What a lovely thing is his *Rosamond Gray!* How much knowledge of the sweetest and deepest parts of our nature in it! When I think of such a mind as Lamb’s—when I see how unnoticed remain things of such exquisite and complete perfection what should I hope for myself, if I had not higher objects in view than fame!”—a criticism that pleased Lamb when Hunt repeated it to him. Again, writing to Hunt in the same year, Shelley said, “Of Lamb you know my opinion, and you can bear witness to the regret which I felt when I learned that the calumny of an enemy had deprived me of his society whilst in England.”

To what Shelley refers I have not discovered (the second Mrs. Godwin with lurid tales of her step-son-in-law’s emotional history comes to one’s mind); yet it is difficult to believe that under any conditions Lamb would ever have cared for Shelley. The two men were curiously different. Lamb kept ever very near the earth; Shelley was all fire and air. Lamb’s sole desire was to remain naturally and quietly among facts as they were; Shelley, essentially in revolt, continually nourished revolutionary ideals. Lamb moved patiently between his lodgings and his office; Shelley rushed, all impatience, from one beautiful country to another. It is doubtful, as I have said, if under any circumstances the two ever would have been friends; but considering his knowledge of the human heart and his sympathy with religious questionings Lamb’s prejudiced attitude to Shelley was extreme, and his comments on Shelley’s death in the letters to Barron Field of September 22nd, and to Barton of October 9th, 1822, show him, I think, in perhaps his least admirable moments.

With Mrs. Shelley, the poet’s widow and Godwin’s daughter, he remained, however, on good terms to the end. Talfourd remarks that Lamb “made some amends for his indifference to Shelley, by his admiration of Mrs. Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which he thought the most extraordinary realisation of the idea of a being out of nature which had ever been effected.”

Vincent Novello, the organist, composer, and founder of the publishing business that bears his name, was the son of an Italian father and an English mother, and was born in 1781. He was thus by six years Lamb’s junior, although one perhaps thinks of him rather as his elder. He married, in 1808, Mary Sabilla Hehl, the daughter of a German father and an English mother, and they had eleven children, one of whom, Clara

Thomas Hood. Mr. Buxton Forman, whose notice I drew to this conjecture, supports it, and makes it more credible by the suggestion that Keats wrote, “Yesterday I called at Lamb’s C. St. Jane looked,” etc.

Anastasia, now the Countess Gigliucci, is still living. Her sister, Mary Sabilla Novello, died as recently as 1904. It is to Mary Victoria, the eldest daughter, who married Charles Cowden Clarke, and who survived until 1892, that we owe our principal knowledge of Vincent Novello and of the family's intercourse with the Lambs. At what date this intercourse began I cannot exactly state, but I think it probable that Leigh Hunt, a close friend of Novello, first took Lamb to 240 Oxford Street somewhen about 1816. That Novello admired the Lambs' writings we know from Mrs. Cowden Clarke's account, in her memoir of her father, of his reading aloud the *Tales from Shakespear* to her as a child.

Novello's drawing-room on Sunday evening became as recognised a place of meeting as Lamb's sitting-room on Wednesdays and Thursdays, but while whist attracted Lamb's friends it was music that brought Novello's together. Lamb has given a glimpse of Novello at the organ in his "Chapter on Ears": "Something like this 'SCENE-TURNING' I have experienced at the evening parties, at the house of my good Catholic friend *Nov*—; who, by the aid of a capital organ, himself the most finished of players, converts his drawing-room into a chapel, his week days into Sundays, and these latter into minor heavens.<sup>1</sup>

"When my friend commences upon one of those solemn anthems, which peradventure struck upon my heedless ear, rambling in the side aisles of the dim abbey, some five and thirty years since, waking a new sense, and putting a soul of old religion into my young apprehension—(whether it be *that*, in which the psalmist, weary of the persecutions of bad men, wisheth to himself dove's wings—or *that other*, which, with a like measure of sobriety and pathos, inquireth by what means the young man shall best cleanse his mind)—a holy calm pervadeth me.—I am for the time

————— rapt above earth,  
And possess joys not promised at my birth.

"But when this master of the spell, not content to have laid a soul prostrate, goes on, in his power, to inflict more bliss than lies in her capacity to receive,—impatient to overcome her 'earthly' with his 'heavenly,'—still pouring in, for protracted

<sup>1</sup> I have been there, and still would go;  
'Tis like a little heaven below.—*Dr. Watts.*

hours, fresh waves and fresh from the sea of sound, or from that inexhausted *German* ocean, above which, in triumphant progress, dolphin-seated, ride those Arions *Haydn* and *Mozart*, with their attendant tritons, *Bach*, *Beethoven*, and a countless tribe, whom to attempt to reckon up would but plunge me again in the deeps,—I stagger under the weight of harmony, reeling to and fro at my wit's end;—clouds, as of frankincense, oppress me—priests, altars, censers, dazzle before me—the genius of *his* religion hath me in her toils—a shadowy triple tiara invests the brow of my friend, late so naked, so ingenuous—he is Pope,—and by him sits, like as in the anomaly of dreams, a she-Pope too,—tri-coroneted like himself!—I am converted, and yet a Protestant;—at once *malleus hereticorum*, and myself grand hierarch: or three heresies centre in my person: I am Marcion, Ebion, and Cerinthus—Gog and Magog—what not?—till the coming in of the friendly supper-tray dissipates the figment, and a draught of true Lutheran beer (in which chiefly my friend shows himself no bigot) at once reconciles me to the rationalities of a purer faith; and restores to me the genuine untterrifying aspects of my pleasant-countenanced host and hostess.” (Lamb's testimony to the recuperative effects of beer is borne out by Edmund Ollier, son of the publisher of his *Works*, who tells us of another musical evening when Lamb “weathered a Mozartian storm” only with the assistance of a foaming mug.)

Novello, in spite of his estranging fidelity to an art beyond Lamb's reach, had much in common with his friend. His daughter tells us that among his dramatic idols were Miss Kelly, Elliston, Munden, Bannister and Liston, and that his admiration of Mrs. Jordan had amounted to a young man's enamoured fancy—recollections of “her laugh, her exquisite laugh,” moved him to the highest enthusiasm. Here Lamb would be wholly with him. Again, he was steeped in Shakespeare, and once played Falstaff in a private performance of “Henry IV. ;” and he liked puns and nonsense. Vincent Novello survived Lamb nearly twenty-seven years. He died in 1861; and a window to his memory was erected in the North transept of Westminster Abbey in 1863.

To Victoria Novello, Mrs. Cowden Clarke, we shall come later, for she was but a child of eight in 1817, yet there is in her *Recollections of Writers* a little glimpse of Lamb among chil-



dren which may be quoted here, as it belongs to this period. Lamb had carried to the Novello nursery a jar of preserved ginger. "Long did the remembrance remain in the family of that delicious rarity, and of the mode in which 'Mr. Lamb' stalked up and down the passage with a mysterious harbinger-ing look and stride, muttering something that sounded like con-juration, holding the precious jar under his arm and feigning to have found it stowed away in a dark chimney somewhere near."

(In Sir Henry Taylor's correspondence is a letter from Miss Kate Perry, daughter of James Perry of the *Morning Chronicle*, containing another account of Lamb with children, with whom, on the infrequent occasions when he met them, he seems to have had a fascinating grave way. "My furthest back recollection," says Miss Perry, "is of his [Lamb's] playing blind man's buff with me and my sisters, in the long room of the Hermitage, where he entered privately, telling us 'not to mention it to the old people on the other side of the house,' with whom he played a solemn game of whist afterwards. This occurred when he lived with his poor sister during one of *her attacks*, at a little cottage of Mr. Bentley's." Mr. Bentley was the guardian of Miss Perry and her sister. His property was, I believe, near Rochester, and on it was the little cottage whither Mary Lamb was occasionally sent. It is only right, however, to add that Lamb could whimsically take another view of "playthings for an hour." A story is told of him, after he had been much plagued by a noisy family, rising to propose the health of the "m-m-much ca-calumniated good King Herod.")

It was the habit of the Novellos, the Hunts and the Lambs to entertain each other's circle in rotation, the only refreshment, by mutual agreement, being bread and cheese, and celery and beer, Lutheran or otherwise. Mrs. Cowden Clarke tells also of "meetings at the theatre, when Munden, Dowton, Liston, Bannister, Elliston and Fanny Kelly were on the stage; and picnic repasts enjoyed together by appointment in the fields that then lay spread in green breadth and luxuriance between the West-end of Oxford Street and the western slope of Hampstead Hill."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Another friend of the Novellos of whom there is no record in Lamb's letters, but whom I should like to think Lamb knew and esteemed, was John Nyren, the cricketer, the author (Charles Cowden Clarke assisting) of *The Young Cricketer's Tutor*, 1833, a book informed by a gusto that only Lamb or Hazlitt could fully appreciate or surpass. Nyren, like Novello, was a Roman Catholic and a man of position and taste, although I fear that the popular impression is that he was an illiterate cricketer incapable of recording his own memories.

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* winds up the year:—

“December 30th, 1817:—I dined with the Colliers, and spent the evening at Lamb's. I found a large party collected round the two poets, but Coleridge had the larger body. There was, however, scarcely any conversation beyond a whisper. Coleridge was philosophizing in his rambling way to Monkhouse, who listened attentively,—to Manning, who sometimes smiled, as if he thought Coleridge had no right to metaphysicize on chemistry without any knowledge on the subject,—to Martin Burney, who was eager to interpose,—and Alsager, who was content to be a listener; while Wordsworth was for a great part of the time engaged tête-à-tête with Talfourd. I could catch scarcely anything of the conversation. But I heard at one time Coleridge quoting Wordsworth's verses, and W. quoting *not* Coleridge's but his own. I chatted with the ladies. Miss Lamb had gone through the fatigue of a dinner-party very well, and C. Lamb was good-humoured. His object of attack was Martin Burney, who was in very good spirits. His uncle Dr. Charles Burney had died on Sunday, and C. L. protested Martin had eaten enormously on account of his grief.”

## CHAPTER XXXII

1818

Coleridge's Lectures—The Plague of Friends—Washington Allston—Lamb's *Works*—His Sonnet against Gifford—Visit to Birmingham—Mary Lamb Ill Again—Philarète Chasles' Description of Lamb—Procter's Description.

WE come now to 1818, a year chiefly remarkable for the issue of Lamb's *Works*, in two volumes, in the summer. It is otherwise of small interest, and there are but five or six letters which can confidently be said to belong to it.

In Crabb Robinson's first entry, on Sunday, January 4th, he records meeting the Wordsworths, Haydon, the Lambs, and others, at Monkhouse's. On January 27th Coleridge's course of lectures on Shakespeare and Poetical Literature, concerning which Lamb had written to Collier, began at a hall in Flower de Luce Court, in Fetter Lane. There were to be fourteen in all; and for a while, at any rate, if not throughout, Coleridge kept his engagements. On February 12th Robinson writes: "I called late on Lamb, who does not attend Coleridge's lectures. C. has not sent him a ticket, which I cannot account for."

On February 18th Lamb writes a long letter to Mrs. Wordsworth, containing an account of the plague of visitors, which he afterwards dressed up for his Popular Fallacy on "Home." He has not, he says, heard either Coleridge or Hazlitt (who was lecturing on Poetry at the Surrey Institution). "I mean to hear some of the course, but lectures are not much to my taste, whatever the Lecturer may be. If *read*, they are dismal flat, and you can't think why you are brought together to hear a man read his works which you could read so much better at leisure yourself; if delivered extempore, I am always in pain lest the gift of utterance should suddenly fail the orator in the middle, as it did me at the dinner given in honour of me at the London Tavern. 'Gentlemen,' said I, and there I stoppt, the rest my feelings were



under the necessity of supplying." It is melancholy that all other record of this dinner has vanished. It may have been a banquet of consolation after "Mr. H."

In the same letter occurs the famous plea for isolation, a lament which, taken in connection with a statement at the end that the India House authorities have just abridged the old custom of leaving at one on Saturdays, may explain much of Lamb's literary unproductiveness at this time. "The reason why I cannot write letters at home is, that I am never alone. Plato's (I write to *W. W.* now) Plato's double animal parted never longed [more] to be reciprocally reunited in the system of its first creation, than I sometimes do to be but for a moment single and separate. Except my morning's walk to the office, which is like treading on sands of gold for that reason, I am never so. I cannot walk home from office but some officious friend offers his damn'd unwelcome courtesies to accompany me. All the morning I am pestered. I could sit and gravely cast up sums in great Books, or compare sum with sum, and write PAID against this and UNP'D against t'other, and yet reserve in some 'corner of my mind' some darling thoughts all my own—faint memory of some passage in a Book—or the tone of an absent friend's Voice—a snatch of Miss Burrell's singing—a gleam of Fanny Kelly's divine plain face. The two operations might be going on at the same time without thwarting, as the sun's two motions (earth's I mean), or as I sometimes turn round till I am giddy in my back parlour while my sister is walking longitudinally in the front—or as the shoulder of veal twists round with the spit, while the smoke wreathes up the chimney—but there are a set of amateurs of the Belle[s] Lettres—the gay science—who come to me as a sort of rendezvous, putting questions of criticism, of British Institutions, Lalla Rook[h]s &c. what Coleridge said at the Lecture last night—who have the form of reading men, but, for any possible use Reading can be to them but to talk of, might as well have been Ante-Cadmeans born, or have lain sucking out the sense of an Egypt<sup>n</sup>. hieroglyph as long as the Pyramids will last before they should find it. These pests worrit me at business and in all its intervals, perplexing my accounts, poisoning my little salutary warming-time at the fire, puzzling my paragraphs if I take a newspaper, cramming in between my own free thoughts and a column of figures which had come to an amicable compromise but for them.

"Their noise ended, one of them as I said accompanys me home lest I should be solitary for a moment; he at length takes his welcome leave at the door, up I go, mutton on table, hungry as hunter, hope to forget my cares and bury them in the agreeable abstraction of mastication, knock at the door, in comes Mrs. Hazlitt, or M. Burney, or Morgan, or Demogorgon, or my brother, or somebody, to prevent my eating alone, a Process absolutely necessary to my poor wretched digestion. O the pleasure of eating alone! eating my dinner alone!—let me think of it. But in they come, and make it absolutely necessary that I should open a bottle of orange—for my meat turns into stone when any one dines with me, if I have not wine—wine can mollify stones. Then *that* wine turns into acidity, acerbity, misanthropy, a hatred of my interrupters (God bless 'em! I love some of 'em dearly) and with the hatred a still greater aversion to their going away. Bad is the dead sea they bring upon me, choking and death-doing, but worse is the deader dry sand they leave me on if they go before bed time. Come never, I would say to these spoilers of my dinner, but if you come, never go. The fact is, this interruption does not happen very often, but every time it comes by surprise that present bane of my life, orange wine with all its dreary stifling consequences, follows. Evening Company I should always like had I any mornings, but I am saturated with human faces (*divine* forsooth) and voices all the golden morning, and five evenings in a week would be as much as I should covet to be in company, but I assure you that is a wonderful week in which I can get two, or one, to myself. I am never C. L. but always C. L. and Co.

"He, who thought it not good for man to be alone, preserve me from the more prodigious monstrosity of being never by myself. I forget bed time, but even there these sociable frogs clamber up to annoy me. Once a week, generally some singular evening that being alone I go to bed at the hour I ought always to be abed, just close to my bedroom window is the club room of a public house, where a set of singers, I take them to be chorus-singers of the two theatres (it must be *both of them*), begin their orgies. They are a set of fellows (as I conceive) who being limited by their talents to the burthen of the song at the play houses, in revenge have got the common popular airs by Bishop or some cheap composer arranged for choruses, that is, to be sung all in chorus. At least I never can catch any of the text of the plain song,

nothing but the Babylonish choral howl at the tail on't. 'That fury being quenched'—the howl I mean—a curseder burden succeeds of shouts and clapping and knocking of the table. At length over-tasked nature drops under it and escapes for a few hours into the society of the sweet silent creatures of Dreams, which go away with mocks and mows at cockcrow. And then I think of the words Christabel's father used (bless me, I have dipt in the wrong ink) to say every morning by way of variety when he awoke—'Every knell the Baron saith Wakes us up to a world of death' or something like it.<sup>1</sup>

"All I mean by this senseless interrupted tale is, that by my central situation I am a little over companied. Not that I have any animosity against the good creatures that are so anxious to drive away the Harpy solitude from me. I like 'em, and cards, and a chearful glass, but I mean merely to give you an idea between office confinement and after office society how little time I can call my own. I mean only to draw a picture, not to make an inference. I would not that I know of have it otherwise. I only wish sometimes I could exchange some of my faces and voices for the faces and voices which a late visitation brought most welcome, and carried away leaving regret, but more pleasure, even a kind of gratitude, at being so often favored with that kind northern visitation."

Crabb Robinson has this entry for April 18th: "I returned to Lamb's again. There was a large party,—the greater part of those who are usually there, but also Leigh Hunt and his wife. . . . He, tho' a man I very much dislike, did not displease me this evening. He has improved in manliness and healthfulness since I saw him last, some years ago. There was a glee about him which evinced high spirits, if not perfect health, and I envied his vivacity. He imitated Hazlitt capitally, Wordsworth not so well. Talfourd was there and injudiciously loquacious, quoting verses without mercy. He threw away Wordsworth's fine lines on 'Scorners.' Hunt, who did not sympathize with Talfourd, opposed him playfully, and that I liked him for."

On April 28th Robinson met the Lambs at Godwin's, and on the 30th he took Lamb to Monkhouse's, where were Haydon and Washington Allston, the American painter, whom Coleridge had

<sup>1</sup> Each matin bell, the Baron saith,  
Knells us back to a world of death.



met in Rome, and whose portrait of Coleridge at Bristol in 1814 is in the National Portrait Gallery. In the *Life and Letters of Washington Allston*, 1893, an interesting book, are some stories of Lamb, of which this perhaps is the best: "Lamb was present when a naval officer was giving an account of an action which he had been in, and to illustrate the carelessness and disregard of life at such times, said that a sailor had both his legs shot off, and as his shipmates were carrying him below, another shot came and took off both his arms; they, thinking he was pretty much used up, though life was still in him, threw him out of a port. 'Shame, d——d shame,' stuttered out Lamb, 'he m-m-might have l-lived to have been an a-a-ornament to Society!'"

In May Lamb was busy with the proofs of his *Works*, which were ready by the middle of June, as a letter to Charles and James Ollier, the publishers, tells us:—

"I am going off to Birmingham<sup>m</sup>. I find my books, whatever faculty of selling they may have (I wish they had more for <sup>{your}</sup><sub>{my}</sub> sake), are admirably adapted for giving away. You have been bounteous. Six more and I shall have satisfied all just claims. Am I taking too great a liberty in begging you to send 4 as follows, and reserve 2 for me when I come home? That will make 31. Thirty-one times 12 is 372 shillings, Eighteen pounds twelve Shillings!!!—but here are my friends, to whom, if you *could* transmit them, as I shall be away a month, you will greatly

"oblige the obliged

"C. LAMB.

"Mr. Ayrton, James Street, Buckingham Gate

"Mr. Alsager, Suffolk Street East, Southwark, by Horse-monger Lane

"and in one parcel

"directed to R. Southey, Esq., Keswick, Cumberland

"one for R. S. ;

"and one for W<sup>m</sup>. Wordsworth, Esq<sup>r</sup>.

"If you will be kind enough simply to write 'from the Author' in all 4—you will still further etc.— . . .

"I think Southey will give us a lift in that damn'd Quarterly. I meditate an attack upon that Cobler Gifford, which shall appear immediately after any favourable mention which S. may make in the Quarterly. It can't in decent *gratitude* appear *before*."

The attack on Gifford was probably the following sonnet, printed in the *Examiner* in 1819:—

ST. CRISPIN TO MR. GIFFORD

All unadvised, and in an evil hour,  
 Lured by aspiring thoughts, my son, you daft  
 The lowly labours of the Gentle Craft  
 For learned toils, which blood and spirits sour.  
 All things, dear pledge, are not in all men's power ;  
 The wiser sort of shrub affects the ground ;  
 And sweet content of mind is oftener found  
 In cobbler's parlour, than in critic's bower.  
 The sorest work is what doth cross the grain ;  
 And better to this hour you had been plying  
 The obsequious awl with well-waxed finger flying,  
 Than ceaseless thus to till a thankless vein ;  
 Still teasing Muses, which are still denying ;  
 Making a stretching-leather of your brain.

Leigh Hunt seems to have been the instigator who definitely arranged for the publication of Lamb's *Works* ; at least so I gather from this sentence in a letter from Hunt to Shelley on April 24th, 1818 : " We go to plays, to operas, and even to concerts, not forgetting a sort of conversazione at Lamb's, with whom, and Alsager, I have renewed the intercourse, with infinite delight, which sickness interrupted. One of the best consequences of this is that Lamb's writings are being collected for publication by Ollier, and are now, indeed, going through the press."

The *Works* were well received, and two, at least, of Lamb's friends treated the book as a publication of the first importance : Talfourd, in the *Champion*, and Leigh Hunt, in the *Examiner*. The two volumes contained, in addition to "John Woodvil," "Rosamund Gray" and the poems, the best of the essays from the *Reflector*, the best criticisms from the "Dramatic Specimens," and "Mr. H." Lamb was forty-three this year, and for some time past had steadily been growing less and less productive. I have no doubt he really believed that these volumes did contain his final representative *Works*, for although we know him to have looked forward to leisure and ease, there is no reason to suppose that he expected any renaissance of literary power or activity ; and yet to-day it is not by anything in his *Works* that Lamb is popularly known at all—if we except the poems "Hester" and "The Old Familiar Faces"—but by writings that were not thought of until two years later.

Of Lamb's visit to Birmingham we know nothing; but since he was to be gone a month it is reasonable to suppose that his sister was with him. That Mary Lamb was ill in August we know from a letter from Mrs. Leigh Hunt to Mary Shelley on August 4th, 1818: "You will be sorry to hear poor Miss Lamb is ill again: what a sad thing it is for such an admirable woman. I don't know how it is, but those things seem to fall on the most delightful and amiable of mankind—I don't mean her particular complaint, but distress and uneasiness in general."

The remainder of 1818 is almost a blank; but possibly to this year belongs the long and diverting letter to John Chambers, a fellow clerk in the East India House, with the famous passage concerning Tommy Bye: "Bye is about publishing a volume of poems which he means to dedicate to Matthie. Methinks he might have found a better Mécenas. They are chiefly amatory, others of them stupid, the greater part very far below mediocrity; but they discover much tender feeling; they are most like Petrarch of any foreign Poet, or what we might have supposed Petrarch would have written if Petrarch had been born a fool!" I have sought in vain for this delectable volume. Perhaps it was not actually published after all.

The last letter of the year is to Coleridge, thanking him for a ticket for one of his two new courses of lectures—one on the "History of Philosophy," and one on "Six Plays of Shakespeare," and promising to spend Sunday, January 3rd, 1819, with him.

The French critic, Philarète Chasles, has given us a picture of Lamb in 1818—in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in 1842, under the title "Le Dernier Humoriste Anglais." "I was at James Valpy's one evening in June, 1818, in his office where the candle must be lit at mid-day, and the fire in June, when a little, dark, old fellow came in; one could only distinguish a head, then big shoulders, then a delicate body, and finally two artistically slender legs, which were almost imperceptible. Under his arm was a green umbrella, and over his eyes a very old hat. Wit, sweetness, melancholy and gaiety gushed in torrents from this extraordinary physiognomy. After first seeing him, you did not think any more of his ridiculous body; it seemed as if something purely intellectual was before you, soaring above matter, burning through the material form, like light, and overflowing everywhere. There was neither health, nor strength and scarcely sufficient anatomical



reality on those poor little spindles, clothed in stockings of Chinese silk, ending in impossible feet, encased in large shoes, which placed flatly on the ground advanced slowly in the manner of a web-footed creature. But one did not notice these singularities, one saw only the magnificently developed forehead, on which his lustrous black hair curled naturally, the great, sad eyes, the expression of the large brownish, clear pupil, the excessively fine nostrils, cut more delicately than have ever been seen in others, the curves of the nose very like that of Jean Jacques in his portraits. All this, the oval of the face, nobly long, the exquisite contour of the mouth, and the beautiful pose of the head, lent dignity, and that of the highest kind—intellectual dignity—to this weakly and disproportioned organisation.

“The good Lamb—whom no one will ever translate, and rightly, a kind of *La Bruyère*, Addison and Sterne; Charles Lamb, *Carlagnulus*, as the learned called him; *Elia*, as did people of fashion (he had thirty different names of endearment given to him by different classes and I never heard him spoken of seriously and solemnly as Mr. Lamb)—the good Lamb came to obtain news of one of his friends, Hugo Boyce, a poor and consumptive young fellow.”

Charles, afterwards Conservateur of the Bibliothèque Mazarine, who did much in his time to introduce English writers to French readers, is not mentioned anywhere in the letters, at least by name. The term *Carlagnulus* was Lamb's own, and otherwise I think was never used by the learned. It is interesting to have Le Grice's testimony as to Lamb's plantigrade gait thus fortified. Of Hugo Boyce I know nothing. Valpy was the publisher of the classics for whom George Dyer did such a prodigious amount of work.

Procter has thus described Lamb, in his Memoir, as he appeared about this time: “Persons who had been in the habit of traversing Covent Garden . . . might by extending their walk a few yards into Russell Street, have noted a small spare man, clothed in black, who went out every morning and returned every afternoon, as regularly as the hands of the clock moved towards certain hours. You could not mistake him. He was somewhat stiff in his manner, and almost clerical in dress; which indicated much wear. He had a long, melancholy face, with keen penetrating eyes; and he walked with a short, resolute step, City-wards. He

looked no one in the face for more than a moment, yet contrived to see everything as he went on. No one who ever studied the human features could pass by without recollecting his countenance; it was full of sensibility, and it came upon you like a new thought, which you could not help dwelling upon afterwards; it gave rise to meditation and did you good. This small half-clerical man was—Charles Lamb.”

The following discerning lines, signed M. E. W., which were printed in *Temple Bar* for July, 1886, come felicitously here, and I take the liberty of quoting them with thanks to their unknown author:—

CHARLES LAMB

A small spare man, close gaitered to the knee,  
 In suit of rusty black whose folds betray  
 The last loved dusty folio, bought to-day,  
 And carried proudly to the sanctuary  
 Of home (and Mary's) keeping. Quaintly wise  
 In saws and knowledge of a bygone age,  
 Each old-world fancy on a yellowed page,  
 Tracked by the "smoky-brightness" of his eyes,  
 Shone new-illuminated; or in daring flight  
 That outvied Ariel, his spirit caught  
 The reflex of a rainbowed cloud, and taught  
 The glories of a Dreamland of delight!  
 A haunter of the bookstalls! Even now  
 We listen for the eager stammering speech  
 That clenched a happy bargain,—think to reach  
 And clasp those nervous fingers—watch the brow  
 Grow lined with trouble at another's pain  
 His large-souled sympathies had made his own,  
 Or linger till the bitterness had flown  
 And low-toned laughter proved him bright again.  
 This man's identity, so sweet, so clear,  
 Could never die with death. We do not say  
 "I should have loved him had the self-same day  
 But found us living," but "I hold him dear  
 Now, at this moment;" and if patient ears,  
 Wrapped in God's silence, dimly now and then  
 Catch echoes of the grateful love of men,  
 Charles Lamb rests happily thro' all these years.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

1819

Crabb Robinson's *Diary*—Charles Lloyd in London—Tommy Bye's Excesses—Lamb's Admiration of Miss Kelly—His Proposal and Her Answer—"The Waggoner"—Lamb at Cambridge—William Wordsworth, junior, at 18 Great Russell Street—Morgan in Distress.

IN 1819 Lamb's pen resumed some of the activity of 1810 and 1811, although the articles which we can attribute to it are few enough ; but the shining event of the year was a very brief but profoundly interesting correspondence with Miss Kelly. To this we come later.

Crabb Robinson's first entry, dated February 2nd, states that Charles and Mary Lamb came that day to look at his prints ; he has nothing more of importance for some months. April 26th is the date of Lamb's letter to Wordsworth in alternate red and black inks, about the mock "Peter Bell," a poor malicious thing which John Hamilton Reynolds (whom Lamb was to know later) had just put forth in anticipation of Wordsworth's poem. Speaking of the real "Peter Bell," which he had seen in manuscript some years before, Lamb says : "It is excellent. For its matter, I mean. I cannot say that the style of it quite satisfies me. It is too lyrical." The lines

Is it a party in a parlour,  
All silent and all damned ?

which Wordsworth afterwards expunged, seem to have stuck to Lamb's memory, for there is a story, told by Ollier, the son of his publisher, of his clinging to the railings of a house where a painfully festive gathering was to be seen, and shouting, "You damned party in a parlour ! You damned party in a parlour !" and shaking the railings as he cried.

Although Lamb does not say so, I fancy that his sister must have been again ill at this time ; for Robinson's next entry seems to suggest it. "May 11th, Tuesday, 1819 :—I then went to C. Lamb. Mrs. Hazlitt and some old female friends of L.'s there.





*Charles Lamb*  
1797

CHARLES LAMB (AGED 40)  
FROM THE WATERCOLOR DRAWING BY G. F. JOSEPH



I gossiped there till eleven ; L. ennuyé with the good kind of people who had visited him, whom he had too much kindness of heart not to entertain to the best of his capacity, but who could not entertain him in return." (Robinson's record of meeting the brother and sister at the Godwin's on July 6th enables us to put a period to this attack.) On June 17th he writes: "I went then to Lamb's, and found the Burneys there and also Hazlitt, besides an odd assemblage, Lloyd the poet and Miss Betham."

Charles Lloyd was at this time settled again in London, apparently quite restored to health and busy with literary plans. His recovery, Talfourd tells us, had been largely brought about by the effect upon him of the acting of Macready in "Rob Roy." "A deep gloom had gradually overcast his mind, and threatened wholly to encircle it, when he was induced to look in at Covent-Garden Theatre and witness the performance of *Rob Roy*. The picture which he then beheld of the generous outlaw,—the frank, gallant, noble bearing,—the air and movements, as of one 'free of mountain solitudes,'—the touches of manly pathos and irresistible cordiality,—delighted and melted him, won him from his painful introspections, and brought to him the unwonted relief of tears. He went home 'a gayer and a wiser man ;' returned again to the theatre, whenever the healing enjoyments could be renewed there ; and sought the acquaintance of the actor who had broken the melancholy spell in which he was enthralled, and had restored the pulses of his nature to their healthful beatings."

Later Lloyd introduced Macready to Lamb, but we have no record of their intercourse beyond Lamb's reference in "Barbara S." to his "classical conference" with that great actor ; Robinson's remark on page 428 ; and the single entry in Macready's diary stating that Lamb once expressed the wish to draw his last breath through a pipe and expel it in a pun. Lloyd's *Nugæ Canoræ*, containing many of his early poems with Coleridge and Lamb, together with new verses, was published in this year. Lamb reviewed the volume in the *Examiner*.

On May 28th Lamb writes to Manning, who was then living alone somewhere in the country, possibly at Totteridge, in Hertfordshire, giving him a long account of the unfortunate effect of a fit of alcoholic excess on the part of Tommy Bye, the India House Petrarch. "Tommy had not brains to work off an over-



night's surfeit by ten o'clock next morning; and unfortunately, in he wandered the other morning drunk with last night, and with a superfoetation of drink taken in since he set out from bed. He came staggering under his double burthen, like trees in Java, bearing at once blossom, fruit, and falling fruit, as I have heard you or some other traveller tell, with his face literally as blue as the bluest firmament; some wretched calico that he had mopped his poor oozy front with had rendered up its native dye, and the devil a bit would he consent to wash it, but swore it was characteristic, for he was going to the sale of indigo, and set up a laugh which I did not think the lungs of mortal man were competent to. It was like a thousand people laughing, or the Goblin Page. He imagined afterwards that the whole office had been laughing *at* him, so strange did his own sounds strike upon his *nonsensorium*! But Tommy has laughed his last laugh, and awoke the next day to find himself reduced from an abused income of £600 per annum to one-sixth of the sum, after thirty-six years' tolerably good service." "Will you drop in to-morrow night?" Lamb adds. "Fanny Kelly is coming, if she does not cheat us."—And this brings us to one whose genius Lamb did more than any one to celebrate.

Frances Maria Kelly, or Fanny Kelly, as she was always called, was born in 1790, and was thus fifteen years younger than Lamb and a quarter of a century younger than his sister. After a very hard-worked childhood, one incident of which is beautifully preserved by Lamb in the *Elia* essay "Barbara S.," Miss Kelly emerged as a popular actress, the artistic successor of Mrs. Jordan, and soon to stand alone as a comedienne. Lamb had early singled her out for his particular admiration. In his *Works* in 1818 had been printed this sonnet:—

#### TO MISS KELLY

You are not, Kelly, of the common strain,  
That stoop their pride and female honor down  
To please that many-headed beast *the town*,  
And vend their lavish smiles and tricks for gain;  
By fortune thrown amid the actor's train,  
You keep your native dignity of thought;  
The plaudits that attend you come unsought,  
As tributes due unto your natural vein.  
Your tears have passion in them, and a grace  
Of genuine freshness, which our hearts avow;

Your smiles are winds whose ways we cannot trace,  
 That vanish and return we know not how—  
 And please the better from a pensive face,  
 And thoughtful eye, and a reflecting brow.

And in January, 1819, in a letter printed in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, which was the property of his friend and school-fellow John Mathew Gutch, Lamb wrote the following appreciation of Miss Kelly's acting, occasioned by her visit to that town: "I very much wish you [Gutch] would go and see her. You will not see Mrs. Jordan, but something else; something on the whole very little, if at all, inferior to that lady in her best days. I cannot hope that you will think so, I do not even wish that you should. Our longest remembrances are the most sacred, and I shall revere the prejudice that shall prevent you from thinking quite so favourably of her as I do. I do not well know how to draw a parallel between their distinct manners of acting. I seem to recognise the same pleasantness and nature in both. But Mrs. Jordan's was the carelessness of a child; her childlike spirit shook off the load of years from her spectators; she seemed one whom care could not come near; a privileged being sent to teach mankind what he most wants—joyousness. Hence, if we had more unmixed pleasure from her performances, we had perhaps less sympathy with them than with those of her successor. This latter lady's is the joy of a freed spirit escaping from care, as a bird that had been limed; her smiles, if I may use the expression, seemed saved out of the fire, relics which a good spirit had snatched up as most portable; her discontents are visitors and not inmates: she can lay them by altogether, and when she does so, I am not sure that she is not greatest."

These were public utterances. In a letter to Wordsworth in the same year Lamb goes farther (as we have seen), speaking of Fanny Kelly's "divine plain face."

We knew therefore that at any rate intellectually Lamb was disposed to look upon Miss Kelly with the utmost kindness; and that at one time his heart also was offered to her, we knew vaguely, from a statement made in two or three places, but with most authority by the late Charles Kent (who had it direct from Miss Kelly) in his memoir of that lady in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. My own feeling had always been that Lamb's proposal was verbal and belonged to the late Enfield period, at a time when he was perhaps for the moment convinced that his

sister, whose illnesses grew worse, had finally been removed from him. It was therefore with surprise that I read the little correspondence between Lamb and Miss Kelly that was recently made public by the late John Hollingshead, which shows that the year of the proposal was as early as 1819 and that Mary Lamb—whom we have seen (on page 243) describing herself as an ideal sister-in-law—knew and approved. The correspondence consists of a letter from Lamb to Miss Kelly, which with no exaggeration may be termed the most interesting that has been printed since Talfourd's *Final Memorials*; one from Miss Kelly in reply to it; and one from Lamb closing the incident.

Lamb's first letter requires a little preface. He was at that time forty-four and in receipt of a salary of £600; Miss Kelly was twenty-nine. In the summer of 1819 Miss Kelly was engaged at the Lyceum (or the English Opera House, as it was also called), which was then leased to Samuel James Arnold, brother-in-law of Lamb's friend Ayrton; and Lamb was writing criticisms of her acting in the *Examiner*. On July 4th appeared his article on "The Jovial Crew" with Miss Kelly as Rachel. Now to read this article in ignorance of the critic's innermost feelings for the actress is to experience no more than the customary intellectual titillation that is imparted by a piece of rich appreciation from such a pen; but to read it knowing what was in his mind at the time is a totally different thing. What before was mere inspired dramatic criticism becomes a revelation charged with human interest. "But the *Princess of Mumpers*, and *Lady Paramount* of beggarly counterfeit accents, was *she* that played *Rachel*. Her gabbling lachrymose petitions; her tones, such as we have heard by the side of old woods, when an irresistible face has come peeping on one on a sudden; with her full black locks, and a *voice*—how shall we describe it?—a voice that was by nature meant to convey nothing but truth and goodness, but warped by circumstance into an assurance that she is telling us a lie—that catching twitch of the thievish irrefragable finger—those ballad-singers' notes, so vulgar, yet so unvulgar—that assurance, so like impudence, and yet so many countless leagues removed from it—her jeers, which we had rather stand, than be caressed with other ladies' compliments, a summer's day long—her face, with a wild out-of-door's grace upon it—— . . . 'What a lass that were,' said a stranger who sate beside us, speaking of Miss Kelly in *Rachel*, 'to go a





FANNY KELLY IN 1819 (AGED 29)

FROM THE FORESTALL BY PARTRIDGE. ENGRAVED BY THOMPSON.



gypseying through the world with.'” Knowing what we do of Charles Lamb’s little ways, we can be in no doubt as to the identity of the stranger who was fabled to have sate beside him.

Miss Kelly would of course read the criticism, and being a woman, and a woman of genius, would probably be not wholly unaware of the significance of a portion of it ; and therefore perhaps she was not altogether unprepared for Lamb’s first letter, which he wrote a fortnight later.

“ 20 July, 1819.

“ DEAR MISS KELLY,—We had the pleasure, *pain* I might better call it, of seeing you last night in the new Play. It was a most consummate piece of Acting, but what a task for you to undergo ! at a time when your heart is sore from real sorrow ! it has given rise to a train of thinking, which I cannot suppress.

“ Would to God you were released from this way of life ; that you could bring your mind to consent to take your lot with us, and throw off for ever the whole burden of your Profession. I neither expect or wish you to take notice of this which I am writing, in your present over occupied & hurried state.—But to think of it at your leisure. I have quite income enough, if that were all, to justify for me making such a proposal, with what I may call even a handsome provision for my survivor. What you possess of your own would naturally be appropriated to those, for whose sakes chiefly you have made so many hard sacrifices. I am not so foolish as not to know that I am a most unworthy match for such a one as you, but you have for years been a principal object in my mind. In many a sweet assumed character I have learned to love you, but simply as F. M. Kelly I love you better than them all. Can you quit these shadows of existence, & come & be a reality to us ? can you leave off harassing yourself to please a thankless multitude, who know nothing of you, & begin at last to live to yourself & your friends ?

“ As plainly & frankly as I have seen you give or refuse assent in some feigned scene, so frankly do me the justice to answer me. It is impossible I should feel injured or aggrieved by your telling me at once, that the proposal does not suit you. It is impossible that I should ever think of molesting you with idle importunity and persecution after your mind [is] once firmly spoken—but happier, far happier, could I have leave to hope a time might come, when our friends might be your friends ; our interests yours ; our book-



knowledge, if in that inconsiderable particular we have any little advantage, might impart something to you, which you would every day have it in your power ten thousand fold to repay by the added cheerfulness and joy which you could not fail to bring as a dowry into whatever family should have the honor and happiness of receiving *you*, the most welcome accession that could be made to it.

“In haste, but with entire respect & deepest affection, I subscribe myself  
C. LAMB.”

It was not Miss Kelly's first proposal. It was the fate of her divine plain face to win a certain grave, persistent, silent love. It was even destined to provoke hopelessness to a tragic degree, for twice in her career she was fired at on the stage, the assailant in one case (and possibly in both) being a desperate admirer. On the first occasion, in 1816, some of the shot, says Mr. Kent, fell in the lap of Mary Lamb, who was present with her brother. Oxberry tells also of a devotee who for at least ten years never failed to attend a London performance in which Miss Kelly took part. He sat in the third or fourth row of the pit, but never told his love; after a glance at her as she left the stage door he disappeared until the next night.

This was Miss Kelly's reply to Lamb's letter, returned by hand—the way, I imagine, in which his proposal had reached her:—

“Henrietta Street, July 20th, 1819.

“An early & deeply rooted attachment has fixed my heart on one from whom no worldly prospect can well induce me to withdraw it but while I thus *frankly* & decidedly decline your proposal, believe me, I am not insensible to the high honour which the preference of such a mind as yours confers upon me—let me, however, hope that all thought upon this subject will end with this letter, & that you will henceforth encourage no other sentiment towards me than esteem in my private character and a continuance of that approbation of my humble talents which you have already expressed so much & so often to my advantage and gratification.

“Believe me I feel proud to acknowledge myself

“Your obliged friend

“F. M. KELLY.”

Lamb also replied at once, and his little romance was over, a single day seeing the whole drama played.

"July 20th, 1819.

"DEAR MISS KELLY,—*Your injunctions shall be obeyed to a tittle.* I feel myself in a lackadaisical no-how-ish kind of a humour. I believe it is the rain, or something. I had thought to have written seriously, but I fancy I succeed best in epistles of mere fun; puns & *that* nonsense. You will be good friends with us, will you not? let what has past 'break no bones' between us. You will not refuse us them next time we send for them?<sup>1</sup>

"Yours very truly,

"C. L.

"Do you observe the delicacy of not signing my full name? N. B. Do not paste that last letter of mine into your Book."

I doubt if there is a better letter than that in English literature; or, in its instant acceptance of defeat, its brave, half-smiling admission that yet another dream was shattered, one more pathetic.

I have said that the drama was played to the end on July 20th; but it had a little epilogue. In the *Examiner* for August 1st Lamb wrote of the Lyceum again. The play was "The Hypocrite," and this is how he spoke of Miss Kelly: "She is in truth not framed to tease or torment even in jest, but to utter a hearty *Yes* or *No*; to yield or refuse assent with a noble sincerity. We have not the pleasure of being acquainted with her, but we have been told that she carries the same cordial manners into private life." That was the end; and is it not the prettiest dramatic criticism in the world?

Miss Kelly died unmarried at the age of ninety-two; Charles Lamb died unmarried at the age of fifty-nine. That his wishes with regard to the old footing were realised we may feel sure, for she continued to visit her friends, both in London and at Enfield, and in later years was taught Latin by Mary Lamb and George Darley; and this reminds me that we have a glimpse of the actress through the eyes of another and an earlier Latin pupil of Mary Lamb—Mary Victoria Novello, afterwards Mrs. Cowden Clarke, who, with young William Hazlitt, studied the rudiments of the language under Miss Lamb's guidance. Says Cowden Clarke: "On one of these occasions of the Latin lessons in Russell Street, Covent Garden, where Mr. and Miss Lamb then

<sup>1</sup>By "bones" Lamb means also the little ivory discs which were given by the management to friends, entitling them to free admission to the theatre.

lived, Victoria saw a lady come in, who appeared to her strikingly intellectual-looking, and still young; she was surprised, therefore, to hear the lady say, in the course of conversation, 'Oh, as for me, my dear Miss Lamb, I'm nothing now but a stocking-mending old woman.' When the lady's visit came to an end, and she was gone, Mary Lamb took occasion to tell Victoria who she was, and to explain her curious speech. The lady was no other than Miss Kelly; and Mary Lamb, while describing to the young girl the eminent merits of the admirable actress, showed her how a temporary depression of spirits in an artistic nature sometimes takes refuge in a half-playful, half-bitter irony of speech."

Before leaving the subject of Charles Lamb's attachment to Miss Kelly, one little point must be mentioned. It has generally been supposed that in the essay "Dream Children," written in 1821, Lamb was imagining what might have happened had he married Alice W——. Does the very recent offer to Miss Kelly put upon that beautiful tissue of wistful regrets and delicate imaginings a new complexion?

To return to the more prosaic current of the year, early in June, 1819, was published *The Waggoner* by William Wordsworth, with the following dedication to Charles Lamb:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND—

"When I sent you, a few weeks ago, 'The Tale of Peter Bell,' you asked 'Why "THE WAGGONER" was not added?' To say the truth, from the higher tone of imagination, and the deeper touches of passion aimed at in the former, I apprehended this little Piece could not accompany it without disadvantage. In the year 1806, if I am not mistaken, 'THE WAGGONER' was read to you in manuscript; and as you have remembered it for so long a time, I am the more encouraged to hope, that, since the localities on which the poem partly depends did not prevent its being interesting to you, it may prove acceptable to others. Being therefore in some measure the cause of its present appearance, you must allow me the gratification of inscribing it to you; in acknowledgment of the pleasure I have derived from your Writings, and of the high esteem with which I am

"Very truly yours,  
"WILLIAM WORDSWORTH."

The poem relates how Benjamin, a reformed waggoner in the Lake Country, again succumbed one stormy night to the temptations of the Cherry Tree Inn at Grasmere, and on reaching Keswick was dismissed by his master. Writing to thank Wordsworth for the dedication Lamb says, on June 7th: "You cannot imagine how proud we are here of the dedication. We read it twice for once that we do the poem—I mean all through—yet Benjamin is



no common favourite—there is a spirit of beautiful tolerance in it—it is as good as it was in 1806—and will be as good in 1829 if our dim eyes shall be awake to peruse it.

“Methinks there is a kind of shadowing affinity between the subject of the narrative and the subject of the dedication—but I will not enter into personal themes—else, substituting \*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\* [Charles Lamb] for Ben, and the Honble United Company of Merch<sup>ts</sup> trading to the East Indies for the Master of the mis-used Team, it might seem by no far fetched analogy to point its dim warnings hitherward—but I reject the omen—especially as its import seems to have been diverted to another victim [*i.e.*, Tommy Bye, whose story is again told, as to Manning above]. . . .

“The Waggoner is very ill put up in boards, at least it seems to me always to open at the dedication—but that is a mechanical fault.”

We have no information as to the Lambs' holidays this year. They seem once again to have gone to Dalston, and may have made occasional excursions from that centre. We know, however, that Lamb was at Cambridge in August (though it may have been only for a day or so) from the circumstance that he sent to the *Examiner* the following sonnet, his best piece of verse for some years, entitled “Written at Cambridge, August 15th, 1819”:

I was not train'd in Academic bowers,  
And to those learned streams I nothing owe  
Which copious from those twin fair founts do flow;  
Mine have been any thing but studious hours.  
Yet can I fancy, wandering 'mid thy towers,  
Myself a nursling, Granta, of thy lap;  
My brow seems tightening with the Doctor's cap,  
And I walk *gowned*; feel unusual powers.  
Strange forms of logic clothe my admiring speech,  
Old Ramus' ghost is busy at my brain;  
And my skull teems with notions infinite.  
Be still, ye reeds of Camus, while I teach  
Truths, which transcend the searching Schoolmen's vein,  
And half had stagger'd that stout Stagirite!

The same idea is expressed in the *Elia* essay “Oxford in the Vacation.” “I can here,” Lamb wrote, of either Cambridge or Oxford, “play the gentleman, enact the student. To such a one as myself, who has been defrauded in his young years of the sweet food of academic institution, nowhere is so pleasant, to while away a few idle weeks at, as one or other of the Universities.

Their vacation, too, at this time of the year, falls in so pat with *ours*. Here I can take my walks unmolested, and fancy myself of what degree or standing I please. I seem admitted *ad eundem*. I fetch up past opportunities. I can rise at the chapel-bell, and dream that it rings for *me*. In moods of humility I can be a Sizar, or a Servitor. When the peacock vein rises, I strut a Gentleman Commoner. In graver moments, I proceed Master of Arts. Indeed I do not think I am much unlike that respectable character. I have seen your dim-eyed vergers, and bed-makers in spectacles, drop a bow or curtsy, as I pass, wisely mistaking me for something of the sort. I go about in black, which favours the notion. Only in Christ Church reverend quadrangle, I can be content to pass for nothing short of a Seraphic Doctor."

From Cambridge Lamb may have journeyed farther; at any rate I think it probable that his meeting with Elliston in the circulating library at Leamington, described in the *Elia* essay "Ellistoniana," belonged to the summer of this year, although in that paper he suggests that it was earlier. In Raymond's *Memoirs of Elliston*, which has for motto two sentences from Lamb, is a story which I have no doubt is true, of Lamb, Elliston and Munden, driving together from Leamington to Warwick Castle, either in 1819 or 1820. Just at the entrance to Leamington, on the return journey, Munden called out: "Stay, stay, my dear boys, I'll just slip out here. Here lives my dear old friend, Mistress Winifred Watson, so I'll look in on the old lady. In her eighty-sixth year, her eighty-sixth year, Mr. Lamb." On the disappearance of Munden as fast as his gait would permit, Elliston burst into laughter, explaining to his perplexed companion that the whole story was a ruse of Munden's to escape settlement time at the livery stables. This, according to Raymond, was Lamb's first face-to-face meeting with Munden, whom he knew so well across the footlights and did so much to make immortal.

On September 26th Crabb Robinson tells us the Lambs are at home. His next entry of any interest is under November 5th: "I called in the forenoon on Miss Lamb. She talked about poor Tom Holcroft, who has been turned by Rickman out of his employ in a way offensive to Lamb. The boy has no situation. His brother has written from India to say he can find him

employment there; but how is he to get over?" Holcroft was a son of the dramatist and had probably held a small clerkship at the House of Commons, as Martin Burney also did, under Rickman. Robinson goes on to say that Anthony Robinson and he will each give £10 to the fund. A letter from Lamb to Holcroft, written probably at this time, counsels him to retain whatever temporary work he had obtained until certain of being able to get to India to try for a post there. Lamb tells him that he has moved into country lodgings, though he is still at the India House in the morning. Crabb Robinson has another entry: "Nov. 16:—I expected to see the Lambs there [at Godwin's] but they did not come. . . . Nothing has been done yet for Tom Holcroft, but it is hoped that a passage will be procured for him to India cheap."

Crabb Robinson again:—

"Nov. 18th, 1819. Thursday:—I then went to Lamb's and played a rubber with his party. . . . I returned again to the Lambs and stayed late; chatted a little with Lloyd, a poor sickly creature he seems—in body and mind—I should judge from his tone of voice and manners, but perhaps I think so because I know the fact. The party was numerous."

The perfect letter of November 25th, from Lamb to Dorothy Wordsworth, describing young William Wordsworth's visit to Great Russell Street, must be printed in full. William Wordsworth, junior, who lived to succeed his father as Comptroller of Stamps, and who died as recently as 1883, was then nine:—

"DEAR MISS WORDSWORTH, You will think me negligent but I wanted to see more of Willy, before I ventured to express a prediction. Till yesterday I had barely seen him—Virgilium Tantum Vidi—but yesterday he gave us his small company to a bullock's heart—and I can pronounce him a lad of promise. He is no pedant nor bookworm, so far I can answer. Perhaps he has hitherto paid too little attention to other men's inventions, preferring, like Lord Foppington, the 'natural sprouts of his own.' But he has observation, and seems thoroughly awake. I am ill at remembering other people's bon mots, but the following are a few. Being taken over Waterloo Bridge, he remarked that if we had no mountains, we had a fine river at least, which was a Touch of the Comparative, but then he added, in a strain which augured less for his future abilities as a Political Economist, that



he supposed they must take at least a pound a week Toll. Like a curious naturalist he inquired if the tide did not come up a little salty. This being satisfactorily answered, he put another question as to the flux and reflux, which being rather cunningly evaded than artfully solved by that she-Aristotle Mary, who muttered something about its getting up an hour sooner and sooner every day, he sagely replied, 'Then it must come to the same thing at last' which was a speech worthy of an infant Halley!

"The Lion in the 'Change by no means came up to his ideal standard. So impossible it is for Nature in any of her works to come up to the standard of a child's imagination. The whelps (Lionets) he was sorry to find were dead, and on particular enquiry his old friend the Ouran Outang had gone the way of all flesh also. The grand Tiger was also sick, and expected in no short time to exchange this transitory world for another—or none. But again, there was a Golden Eagle (I do not mean that of Charing) which did much arride and console him. William's genius, I take it, leans a little to the figurative, for being at play at Tricktrack (a kind of minor Billiard-table which we keep for smaller wights, and sometimes refresh our own mature fatigues with taking a hand at), not being able to hit a ball he had iterate aimed at, he cried out, 'I cannot hit that beast.' Now the balls are usually called men, but he felicitously hit upon a middle term, a term of approximation and imaginative reconciliation, a something where the two ends, of the brute matter (ivory) and their human and rather violent personification into *men*, might meet, as I take it, illustrative of that Excellent remark in a certain Preface about Imagination, explaining 'like a sea-beast that had crawled forth to sun himself.'<sup>1</sup> Not that I accuse William Minor of hereditary plagiary, or conceive the image to have come ex traduce. Rather he seemeth to keep aloof from any source of imitation, and purposely to remain ignorant of what mighty poets have done in this kind before him. For being asked if his father had ever been on Westminster Bridge, he answer'd that he did not know.

<sup>1</sup> Lamb alludes to the preface to the edition of 1815 of Wordsworth's poems, where he quotes illustratively from his "Resolution and Independence":—

Like a Sea-beast crawled forth, which on a shelf  
Of rock or sand reposes, there to sun himself.

“It is hard to discern the Oak in the Acorn, or a Temple like St. Paul’s in the first stone which is laid, nor can I quite prefigure what destination the genius of William Minor hath to take. Some few hints I have set down, to guide my future observations. He hath the power of calculation in no ordinary degree for a chit. He combineth figures, after the first boggle, rapidly. As in the Tricktrack board, where the hits are figured, at first he did not perceive that 15 and 7 made 22, but by a little use he could combine 8 with 25—and 33 again with 16, which approacheth something in kind (far let me be from flattering him by saying in degree) to that of the famous American boy.<sup>1</sup> I am sometimes inclined to think I perceive the future satirist in him, for he hath a sub-sardonic smile which bursteth out upon occasion, as when he was asked if London were as big as Amble-side, and indeed no other answer was given, or proper to be given, to so ensnaring and provoking a question. In the contour of skull certainly I discern something paternal. But whether in all respects the future man shall transcend his father’s fame, Time the trier of geniuses must decide. Be it pronounced peremptorily at present, that Willy is a well-mannerd child, and though no great student, hath yet a lively eye for things that lie before him. Given in haste from my desk at Leadenhall. Your’s and yours’ most sincerely  
C. LAMB.”

The following passage in a letter from Southey to Grosvenor Bedford, December 3rd, 1819, shows Lamb assuming another responsibility—a small one, it is true, but one that many richer men would reject. Coleridge’s friend Morgan, with whom the Lambs had stayed at Calne in 1817, had met with misfortune. “I must trespass on you farther, and request that you will seal up ten pounds, and leave it with Rickman, directed for Charles Lamb, Esq., from R. S. It is for poor John Morgan, whom you may remember some twenty years ago. This poor fellow, whom I knew at school, and whose mother has sometimes asked me to her table, when I should otherwise have gone without a dinner, was left with a fair fortune, from £10,000 to £15,000, and without any vice or extravagance of his own, he has lost the whole of it. A stroke of the palsy has utterly disabled him from doing anything to maintain himself; his wife, a good-

<sup>1</sup> This was Zerah Colburn, the mathematical prodigy, born in Vermont State in 1804 and exhibited in America and Europe by his father.

natured, kind-hearted woman, whom I knew in her bloom, beauty, and prosperity, has accepted a situation as mistress of a charity-school, with a miserable salary of £40 a-year; and this is all they have. In this pitiable case, Lamb and I have promised him ten pounds a-year each, as long as he lives."

One more quotation from Crabb Robinson: "Dec. 16th, 1819. Thursday:—I went after 9 to Lamb's. The party there; Hazlitt too. He and I exchanged a few words. I was the first to speak and he only answered me. Played whist."

To this year belongs a curious entry in the journal of George Ticknor, the American historian. After a description of Godwin and Mrs. Godwin on Snow Hill, he says: "The true way, however, to see these people was to meet them all together, as I did once at dinner at Godwin's, and once at a convocation or Saturday Night Club, at Hunt's, where they felt themselves bound to show off and produce an effect; for there Lamb's gentle humour, Hunt's passion, and Curran's volubility, Hazlitt's sharpness and point, and Godwin's great head of cold brains, all coming into contact and conflict, and agreeing in nothing but their common hatred of everything that has been more successful than their own works, made one of the most curious and amusing *olla podrida* I ever met."

Lamb seems out of place in this embittered night scene, and is probably again the victim of the generalising habit; but the passage has interest.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

1820

A very Short Chapter—Charles Aders—John Thelwall and the *Champion*—Lamb's Political Epigrams—The Regent and Canning—James Sheridan Knowles—The Wordsworths in London—The Lambs at Cambridge Again—Emma Isola—Mary Lamb Again Ill—Miss Kelly—Thomas Allsop.

TO 1820, in one respect the most important year in Lamb's life, belong only five or six letters, all of which are comparatively trivial, the principal one being from Mary Lamb to Mrs. Vincent Novello, to sympathise with her on the loss of a little girl (the same little girl that prompted Leigh Hunt's essay "Death of Little Children").

Crabb Robinson helps to fill in the gaps:—

"January 3rd, 1820:—A call on Miss Lamb. Later met Charles and Miss Lamb at Mr. Aders'. I was not in spirits. Aders exhibited his Campo Sacro to L. which he greatly enjoyed. And we had a rubber or two of whist. Mr. and Mrs. Smith also were of the party. We staid long, Aders had provided a profuse supper. L. was temperate but rather dull at the same time. However he seemed to enjoy himself, and that is the truest flattery." Charles Aders, a friend of Robinson, was a merchant of German extraction, with a house in Euston Square packed with pictures. In 1831 Lamb wrote some lines on his collection, and one of the prettiest of his later poems, "Angel Help," was suggested by an engraving in Mrs. Aders' album.

"March 2nd:—I called in the forenoon on Lamb to give him £10, a contribution towards sending Tom Holcroft to India. He will probably soon set out, and I consider this morning as well spent. Villiers H. is well settled in India and has offered to provide for his brother if he can be sent out. Miss L. told me of a Burney party this evening and I went to James Street. . . . Walked home late with the Lambs.

“April 20th. Thursday:—I took tea and spent the evening at Lamb’s. . . Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt were there, people with whom I am not cordial but I nevertheless enjoyed the evening. I took Tom to L.”

Robinson does not refer to Lamb’s reappearance as a political satirist, but at this period, in the spring and early summer of 1820, his pen from time to time put forth, for Thelwall’s *Champion*, a blistering attack on the Regent. John Thelwall, whom we last heard of in 1797 on his way to Stowey, had later settled down to teach elocution and a mode of overcoming impediments of speech; but in 1818 he again entered political life and bought the *Champion*. Lamb’s contributions consisted of very bitter little epigrams directed almost entirely against the Regent and those of his friends, principally Canning, whom he believed to be advising him in his treatment of Caroline of Brunswick. When asked if he were a King’s or Queen’s man, Coleridge had replied that he was not for the Queen, but against the King; but Lamb was for the Queen unconditionally. Here is one of his anti-Georgics (March 18th, 1820):—

#### THE GODLIKE

In one great man we view with odds  
A parallel to all the gods,  
Great Jove, that shook heaven with his brow,  
Could never match his princely bow.  
In him a Bacchus we behold:  
Like Bacchus, too, he ne’er grows old.  
Like Phœbus next, a flaming lover;  
And then he’s Mercury—all over.  
A Vulcan, for domestic strife,  
He lamely lives without his wife.  
And sure—unless his wits be dull—  
Minerva-like, when moon was full,  
He issued from paternal skull.

And here is his sonnet to Alderman Wood, the Queen’s principal London friend, at whose house she lodged; the Zany of Debate being Canning, and the pickpocket Peer, Dundas. The date is May 13th, 1820:—

Hold on thy course uncheck’d, heroic WOOD!  
Regardless what the player’s son may prate,  
Saint Stephens’ fool, the Zany of Debate—  
Who nothing generous ever understood.

London's twice Prætor ! scorn the fool-born jest—  
 The stage's scum, and refuse of the players—  
 Stale topics against Magistrates and Mayors—  
 City and Country both thy worth attest.  
 Bid him leave off his shallow Eton wit,  
 More fit to sooth the superficial ear  
 Of drunken PITT, and that pickpocket Peer,  
 When at their sottish orgies they did sit,  
 Hatching mad counsels from inflated vein,  
 Till England, and the nations, reeled with pain.

It is interesting that the year which was later to initiate the *Essays of Elia* should have led also to so much gall. But Lamb's attitude to the Regent is natural enough. Apart altogether from any baseness of character and unscrupulous indulgence, the mere unchivalry of his conduct to his wife would have excited to fury the friend of Joseph Paice.

"The year 1820," says Talfourd, "gave Lamb an interest in Macready beyond that which he had derived from the introduction of Lloyd, arising from the power with which he animated the first production of one of his oldest friends—'Virginius.'" The author, James Sheridan Knowles, Talfourd continues, "had been a friend and disciple of Hazlitt from a boy; and Lamb had liked and esteemed him as a hearty companion; but he had not guessed at the extraordinary dramatic power which lay ready for kindling in his brain, and still less at the delicacy of tact with which he had unveiled the sources of the most profound affections. Lamb had almost lost his taste for acted tragedy, as the sad realities of life had pressed more nearly on him; yet he made an exception in favour of the first and happiest part of 'Virginius,' those paternal scenes, which stand alone in the modern drama, and which Macready informed with the fulness of a father's affection." "Virginius" was performed in London for the first time, with Macready in the title-rôle, on May 17th, 1820. Later in the year Lamb addressed some congratulatory verses to Knowles in the *London Magazine*.

Crabb Robinson again:—

"June 2nd, 1820:—At nine I went to Lamb's, where Mr. and Mrs. Wordsworth were. . . . Lamb was in a good humour: he read some recent compositions, which Wordsworth cordially praised—he seemed to enjoy Lamb's society. Not much was said about his new volume of poems. But he himself spoke of his



‘Brownie’s Cell’ as his favourite. It appears that he had heard of a recluse living on the island when there himself, and afterwards of his being gone, no one knew whither, as the fact on which the poem is founded.

“June 21st, 1820:—After taking tea at home I called at Monkhouse’s, and spent an agreeable evening. Wordsworth was very pleasant. Indeed he is uniformly so now. And there is absolutely no pretence for what was always an exaggerated charge against him, that he could talk only of his own poetry, and loves only his own works. He is more indulgent than he used to be of the works of others, even contemporaries and rivals, and is more open to arguments in favour of changes in his own poems. Lamb was in excellent spirits. Talfourd came in late, and we stayed till past twelve. Lamb was at last rather overcome, but it produced nothing but humorous expressions of his desire to go on the Continent, in which I should delight to accompany him.

“June 27th, 1820:—Went to Lamb, found the Wordsworths there, and having walked with them to Westminster Bridge, returned to Lamb, and sat an hour with Macready. He is a very pleasing man, quite gentlemanly in his manners, etc., and sensible and well informed.

“July 18th, 1820:—[At Cambridge on circuit.] After a day’s work at Huntingdon, I had just settled for the evening, when I was agreeably surprised by a call from Miss Lamb. I was heartily glad to see her, and accompanying her to her brother’s lodgings, I had a very pleasant rubber of whist with them and a Mrs. Smith. An acceptable relief from circuit society.

“July 20th:—I had nothing to do to-day, and therefore had leisure to accompany Lamb and his sister on a walk behind the colleges. All Lamb’s enjoyments are so pure and hearty, that it is an enjoyment to see him enjoy. We walked about the exquisite chapel and the gardens of Trinity.”

This shows us that the Lambs spent their summer holiday at Cambridge. Robinson says nothing more of Mrs. Smith, but Lamb carried away her landmarks in his mind and a year or so later reproduced them in the essay “The Gentle Giantess,” transferring her home to Oxford and styling her the Widow Blackett. It was also at Cambridge on this occasion that Lamb collected more of his impressions (a truly Eliaian whim) of “Oxford in the Vacation,” the second of the Essays of Elia—to which we are

coming directly—and where (and not in a nook at Oriel) he met George Dyer. And I think it was probably on this visit to Cambridge that the Lambs first saw Emma Isola, who was destined to bring so much happiness into their lives—meeting her at the house of Mrs. Paris, a sister of William Ayrton, in Trumpington Street, where she was living with her aunt Miss Humphreys.

Emma Isola was then a little motherless girl of eleven, one of the daughters of Charles Isola, Esquire Bedell of Cambridge University, and granddaughter of Agostino Isola, an Italian, resident in Cambridge, among whose pupils had been Wordsworth. Of Charles Isola we have a glimpse in Henry Gunning's *Reminiscences of Cambridge*: "On Sept. 5th, 1797, an election took place of an Esquire Bedell in the room of William Matthew, LL.B., Fellow and Bursar of Jesus College, deceased. . . . A candidate appeared in the person of John Ellis, Esq., M.A., a Fellow of King's College. . . . His opponent was Charles Isola, B.A. of Emanuel College, the son of Agostino Isola, a teacher of Italian in this town. The father was generally beloved, particularly by his pupils, who were very numerous. There was a great desire amongst the members of the University, particularly amongst those of his own college, to do something for his son, who was a man of inoffensive manners, and had not, I believe an enemy in the world; but his shyness and reserve were so great that it pained him to mix in society. . . . At the election Isola was chosen by a large majority, the numbers being for Isola, 94; for Ellis, 42."

The Lambs seemed to have asked Emma to spend Christmas with them, for on January 27th, 1821 (to look forward a little), Charles wrote the following letter to Miss Humphreys:—

"DEAR MADAM, Carriages to Cambridge are in such request, owing to the Installation, that we have found it impossible to procure a conveyance for Emma before Wednesday, on which day between the hours of 3 and 4 in the afternoon you will see your little friend, with her bloom somewhat impaired by late hours and dissipation, but her gait, gesture, and general manners (I flatter myself) considerably improved by — *somebody that shall be nameless*. My sister joins me in love to all true Trumpingtonians, not specifying any, to avoid *envy*; and begs me to assure you that Emma has been a very good girl, which, with certain limitations, I must myself subscribe to. I wish I could cure her of making

dog's ears in books, and pinching them on poor Pompey, who, for one, I dare say, will heartily rejoyce at her departure.

“ Dear Madam,

“ Yours truly

“ foolish C. L.”

In 1823, when Charles Isola died, Charles and Mary Lamb seem definitely to have adopted Emma Isola as their daughter.

Leaving Elia for the present, I will finish the domestic year at this point. A letter to Hazlitt in September tells us that Mary Lamb is ill again: “the last thing she read was the ‘Thursday Nights’ which seem’d to give her unmix’d delight”—referring to the second part of Hazlitt’s essay “On the Conversation of Authors” in the *London Magazine* for September, 1820, quoted on page 378. For the rest of our information we must go to Crabb Robinson:—

“November 18th, 1820:—The afternoon was agreeable. I dined with the Wordsworths, and Lambs, and Mr. Kenyon, at Monkhouse’s. It was an agreeable company and a good dinner, though I could not help sleeping. Wordsworth and Monkhouse either followed my example, or set me one, and Lamb talked as if he were asleep. We brought him away in a tolerable state, though poor Miss L. was troubled about him.” Kenyon was John Kenyon, author of a “Rhymed Plea for Tolerance,” who is best known as the friend of the Brownings.

“November 21st, 1820:—I went late to Lamb’s, and stayed an hour there very pleasantly. The Wordsworths were there, and Dr. Stoddart. The Doctor was very civil to me. Politics were hardly touched on, for Miss Kelly stepped in, who drew our attention to a far more agreeable subject. She pleased me much. She is neither young nor handsome, but very agreeable: her voice and manner those of a person who knows her own worth but is at the same time not desirous to assume upon it. She talks like a sensible woman. Barry Cornwall, too, came in. He said but little to any one except Wordsworth, and that in a half whisper.” This entry shows us that Miss Kelly had resumed her friendly intercourse with the Lambs, as if nothing had happened.

“December 24th:—Went to Lamb’s at Dalston. W. Godwin was there. We played whist an hour and then I walked with W. G. to town. L. lent me, and I read at night, *Sintram and his Companions*, from the German of Fouqué.



“December 27th :—Took tea at Lamb’s. One of his monthly parties; less agreeable than usual. His vulgar brother there, whose manners are intolerable, and Phillips. And late Ayrton, also Talfourd, stepped in.”

In this year we might perhaps take note of a new friend in the person of Thomas Allsop, aged twenty-five, the “favourite disciple of Coleridge,” as he was called. Allsop, who was in business as a silk merchant, was a man of very generous nature, and he seems early to have discovered that one road to Lamb’s heart (as Lamb himself publicly stated later) was by presents of game. Writing to Miss Wordsworth in January, 1821, Lamb says that Allsop sends hares and pheasants twice a week: “I have almost forgotten butcher’s meat as Plebeian.” Allsop’s benefactions to Coleridge were of a more substantial character.

A few years later, in 1825, the Lambs and the Allsops shared lodgings at Enfield, and although there is no indication that they ever became intimate on the highest plane, they were very friendly. Were it not for such relations as subsisted between them, we should be without many stories of Lamb that are to be found in the *Letters, Conversations and Recollections of Coleridge*, which Allsop compiled. I quote a few passages:—

“I am quite aware that I can convey no notion of what Charles Lamb *was*, hardly even of what he said, as far the greatest part of its value depended upon the manner in which it was said. Even the best of his jokes—and *how good* they were you can never know—depended upon the circumstances, which to narrate would be to overlay and weary the attention.

“The following lines of Lloyd [see page 135] will convey some idea, though very imperfect, of this model-man:—

‘The child of impulse ever to appear,  
And yet through duty’s path strictly to steer!

Oh Lamb, thou art a mystery to me!  
Thou art so prudent and so mad with wildness,  
Thou art a source of everlasting glee!  
Yet desolation of the very childless  
Has been thy lot! Never in one like thee  
Did I see worth majestic from its wildness;  
So far in thee from being an annoyance,  
E’en to the vicious ’tis a source of joyance.’

“He asked me what I thought of Coleridge. I spoke as I

thought. 'You should have seen him twenty years ago,' said he, with one of his sweet smiles, 'when he was with me at the Cat and Salutation in Newgate Market. *Those were* days (or nights), but they were marked with a white stone. Such were his extraordinary powers, that when it was time for him to go and be married, the landlord entreated his stay, and offered him free quarters if he would only talk.'<sup>1</sup>

"I [said Lamb] advised Coleridge to alter the lines in *Christabel* :—

' Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,  
Had a toothless mastiff bitch,

into—

' Sir Leoline, the Baron round,  
Had a toothless mastiff hound;

but Coleridge, who has no alacrity in altering, changed this first termination to "which," but still left in the other, "bitch."

"Irving [Lamb is still speaking] once came back to ask me if I could ever get in a word with Coleridge. "No!" said I, "I never want." "Why, perhaps it is better not," said the parson, and went away, determined how to behave in future.'

"Wordsworth, the *greatest* poet of these times. Still he is not, nor yet is any man, an 'Ancient Mariner.'

"The conversation turned one night on the evidence against the Queen Caroline of Brunswick, especially Majocchi. Lamb said he should like to see them; he would ask them to supper. Mr. Talfourd observed, 'You would not sit with them?' 'Yes,' said Lamb, 'I would sit with anything but a hen or a tailor.'

"Somerset House, Whitehall Chapel (the old Banqueting Hall), the church at Limehouse and the new church at Chelsea, with the Bell house at Chelsea College, which always reminded him of Trinity College, Cambridge, were the objects most interesting to him in London. He did not altogether agree with Wordsworth, who thought the view from Harewood-place one of the finest in old London; he admired more the houses at the Bond-street corner of George-street, which Manning said were built of bricks resembling in colour the great wall of China."

Allsop also records some conversation at a Sunday dinner alone with Lamb, when Lamb delivered himself of some very free utterances concerning authoresses. "Spoke of Mrs. Inchbald as the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Thomas Hutchinson thinks it more likely to have been the landlord of the Angel, in Butcher Hall Street, where Coleridge also had lodged.

only enduring clever woman he had ever known; called them impudent, forward, unfeminine, and unhealthy in their minds. Instanced, amongst many others, Mrs. Barbauld, who was a torment and curse to her husband. 'Yet,' said Lamb, 'Letitia was only just tinted; she was not what the she-dogs now call an intellectual woman.'" Patmore also mentions Lamb's whimsical intolerance of the writing sisterhood. "We spoke of L. E. L., and Lamb said—'If she belonged to me I would lock her up and feed her on bread and water till she left off writing poetry. A female poet, or female author of any kind, ranks below an actress, I think.'"

Allsop, who, like so many of Lamb's friends, was always to be found on the side of the minority, threw himself into the Chartist movement, and later sailed to America to avoid arrest on the groundless charge of complicity in Orsini's attempt on the life of Napoleon III. in December 1857—the Italian having arrived in Paris for his purpose with a passport bearing Allsop's name. He survived until 1880.



## CHAPTER XXXV

## THE LONDON MAGAZINE AND ELIA

1820-1825

The *London Magazine*—John Scott—His Death—*Blackwood* and Lamb—“Christopher North”—John Taylor—New Friends—H. F. Cary—Thomas Griffiths Wainwright—John Clare—The *London's* Decay—The Birth of *Elia*—Lamb's Place in Literature—Lamb and Hazlitt as Influences—The Evolution of an Essay—Lamb's Praise of *Elia*—Mr. Swinburne's Eulogy—Walter Pater on Lamb.

TO the great event of 1820 we must now devote ourselves—Lamb's enrolment as a contributor to the new *London Magazine*, and the inception of those essays upon which his fame most securely rests.

The first number of the *London Magazine* (an old title) was published by Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, under the editorship of John Scott, in January, 1820. Scott, the friend of Haydon, had been the editor of the *Champion* before Thelwall bought it, and Lamb, as we have seen, had written something for that paper in Scott's time. Hence perhaps Scott's invitation to him to write now, although Talfourd tells us that his association with the *London* was due to Hazlitt.

John Scott was born in 1783; after a short term in the War Office he had become an editor, and he had written two excellent books of travel, *A Visit to Paris in 1814*, and *Paris Revisited in 1815*. Talfourd says of him, after enumerating the chief writers on the staff: “Over these contributors John Scott presided, himself a critic of remarkable candour, eloquence, and discrimination, unfettered by the dogmas of contending schools of poetry and art; apt to discern the good and beautiful in all; and having, as editor, that which Kent recognised in Lear, which subjects revere in kings, and boys admire in schoolmasters, and contributors should welcome in editors—*authority*;—not manifested in a worrying, teasing, intolerable interference in small matters, but in a judicious and steady superintendence of the

whole ; with a wise allowance of the occasional excesses of wit and genius." And again : " Never was a periodical work commenced with happier auspices, numbering a list of contributors more original in thought, more fresh in spirit, more sportive in fancy, or directed by an editor better qualified by nature and study to preside, than this ' London.' "

Scott was undoubtedly an editor of genius. Having attracted to himself some very able writers, chief of whom at first was Hazlitt, he stimulated them—as is the duty of a born editor—to surpass themselves. Lamb, who joined during the summer, also responded to Scott's stimulus ; and everything was going well with the magazine when Scott was so ill-advised as to be drawn into a contest with *Blackwood*, the magazine at whose supremacy the new *London* was particularly levelled. *Blackwood* had said some caustic things about Cockneys in literature ; Scott replied in the number for January, 1821. Literary quarrels in those days had more venom than we can muster now, and there was no mincing of epithets ; but Scott made a mistake which he might easily have avoided had he not been hurried : he imputed to John Gibson Lockhart not only the authorship of certain of *Blackwood's* criticisms, but also the editorship of the magazine, and, in the face of Lockhart's denial, maintained the truth of the imputation. Lockhart took the matter very seriously and, through his friend Jonathan Henry Christie, sent Scott a challenge. Into the merits of the quarrel this is not the place to enter. Mr. Lang states the case very clearly in his *Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, and it is difficult to acquit Scott of certain unfortunate hesitations. In the end, after a painful delay, although the duel with Lockhart was not fought, Scott was inextricably involved in a meeting with Lockhart's second. It took place at Chalk Farm on February 16th, 1821, with pistols. Scott, whose second was Peter George Patmore (afterwards a friend of Lamb's), was shot above the hip, and he died on February 27th—the first and last magazine editor in this country thus to end his life. Editors undoubtedly should stick to ink. Literature may be said to have sustained a great loss, for Scott had the welfare of the *London* at heart and was in the way to discover and inspire other good writers.

(Lamb, I might say in passing, came in for some of the abuse levelled at the Cockneys. In *Blackwood* for November, 1820,

Maginn, writing as Olinthus Petre, D.D., affected to find every kind of bad taste in the essay on Christ's Hospital. In May, 1821, he apologised, although not with much generosity, absolving Lamb and blaming the bad Cockney influence. In 1822 John Wilson, "Christopher North," got to work with the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, and Lamb was mentioned again, but with more kindness. In the second *Nox*, in a review of periodical literature, Elia is thus referred to:—

"*Buller*. 'Taylor and Hessey's Magazine—is it better?'

"*Tickler*. 'Sometimes much better, and often much worse. Elia in his happiest moods delights me; he is a fine soul; but when he is dull, his dulness sets human stupidity at defiance. He is like a well-bred, ill-trained pointer. He has a fine nose, but he won't or can't range. He keeps always close to your foot, and then he points larks and tit-mice. You see him snuffing and snoking and brandishing his tail with the most impassioned enthusiasm, and then drawn round into a semicircle he stands beautifully—dead set. You expect a burst of partridges, or a towering cock-pheasant, when lo, and behold, away flits a lark, or you discover a mouse's nest, or there is absolutely nothing at all. Perhaps a shrew has been there the day before.—Yet if Elia were mine, I would not part with him, for all his faults.'"

Three months later Christopher North printed his "Metricum Symposium," where, ticking off the *London Magazine* writers, he says:—

And this bumper to Lamb we send gratefully greeting,  
For we love his deep baaing and beautiful bleating.

It will thus be seen that the Scotchmen did not allow their contempt for the Cockneys to blind them to Lamb's genius, although they may have grudged their praise. Wilson, as we shall see, came to know Lamb personally and to love his work; and a few years later Lamb himself was among *Maga's* contributors.)

Upon Scott's death the interest of Baldwin, Cradock & Joy in the *London Magazine* seems to have evaporated; and they were glad to sell it in the summer of 1821 to Messrs. Taylor & Hessey, whose imprint first appears in the number for August of that year. Taylor & Hessey had a fair name as publishers, having issued among other works, the poems of Keats. The mistake which they made in connection with the *London Magazine* was not to appoint an editor, a policy which proved steadily disastrous. John Taylor, the head of the firm, with whom Lamb had all his dealings, took the control of the magazine into his own hands, established



a periodical dinner of contributors in the new premises at 13 Waterloo Place (which had been taken in addition to 93 Fleet Street), and introduced Thomas Hood as sub-editor. Taylor, however, was far from being another Scott; his own literary achievements, such as they were, had been concerned with the alleged identification of Sir Philip Francis with Junius, in itself a meritorious action, but no guarantee of good editorship. (Later, on ceasing to be a publisher, he took to economics and biblical criticism.) Not only through want of imagination, but also by a policy of penuriousness, Taylor in time ruined this most promising property. His partner, James Augustus Hessey (1785-1870), who had less part in Lamb's life, was the father of the late Archdeacon Hessey, for whom and his brother, when at school, Lamb once wrote epigrams. Keats called him "Mistessey."

At the first, under Scott and Baldwin, I do not fancy that Lamb had any close association with the other writers for the *London Magazine*; but when in 1821 it passed into the hands of Taylor & Hessey, a more companionable era set in. At the monthly dinners Lamb quickly made a few new friends and many new acquaintances. To the chief new friends, Bernard Barton and Thomas Hood, we shall come later.

Perhaps Lamb was drawn to none of his *London Magazine* associates, in the second degree, more than to the Rev. H. Francis Cary, the translator of Dante, whom Coleridge had met on the sands at Littlehampton in 1817. Cary, who afterwards became an assistant keeper of the Printed Books in the British Museum, where Lamb and his sister visited him, contributed to the *London* a series of papers on old French poets, continuations of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, and other articles. Writing to Manning in 1832 Lamb says: "C. is a dear fellow, with but two vices, which in any less good than himself would be crimes past redemption. He has no relish for Parson Adams—hints that he might not be a very great Greek scholar after all (does Fielding hint that he was a Porson?)—and prefers 'Ye shepherds so cheerful and gay,' and 'My banks they are furnished with bees,' to 'The Schoolmistress.'" In the same letter Lamb calls him "the flower of clergymen"; but he once told him in conversation that though he was perhaps as good as Dr. Primrose he was not so good as Parson Adams. The memoir of Cary, by his son,

has this story: "I remember that a quotation from one of our dramatists provoked a round of puns on the names of various herbs; the last two introduced had been 'mint and anise,' when Lamb sputtered out, 'Now, Cary, it's your turn.' 'It's cumin,' was the prompt rejoinder. 'Then I won't make another pun to-day,' stammered Lamb." It was Cary who wrote the verses on Lamb's grave at Edmonton.

At the opposite pole to Cary among the new acquaintances was "Janus Weathercock," or, to give him his true name (now infamous), Thomas Griffiths Wainwright. For Wainwright Lamb nourished a tenderness which ever since has perplexed and disappointed many good men, chief among them Talfourd, who devoted too large a portion of the first edition of the *Final Memorials* to the description, with the fervid passion of a prosecuting counsel, of Wainwright's appalling turpitude. (Many of the pages containing the indictment were afterwards excised.) But in 1821 Wainwright's depravity was yet to be. We ought not, I think, to forget that his downfall proceeded from extravagances that did not reach a culmination until later; and that Lamb knew and liked only the Wainwright of this early period: an amusing conceited dandified flâneur, different from Lamb in every respect but warm-heartedness (real or apparent—probably real to Lamb at any rate) and love of good pictures and good phrases. In those days I think it very likely that he could be quite amusingly charming. Yet even had Lamb suspected the presence of the seeds of crime, he was not the man to pass judgment on potentialities. Sufficient for the day was its evil.

Thomas Griffiths Wainwright was twenty-six in the year that the *London Magazine* was founded. He was outwardly a very splendid person: he rode a noble horse, "Contributor," in the Park; his hands were heavy with rings; he exhibited at the Royal Academy; he wrote rattle-pated articles in the *London* and elsewhere, which, for the most part coxcombical and frivolous, now and then prove him to have possessed fine sensibilities and artistic acumen. He was one of the few who recognised the genius of Blake during his lifetime, and who purchased copies of the original issue of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Blake, in return, described Wainwright's Academy picture for 1822 as "very fine." But his greatest claim to our consideration

is that Lamb liked him and that he wrote prettily of Lamb. Lamb enjoyed his society immensely, possibly a little because Wainewright enjoyed his; he was among his guests in Great Marlborough Street, as were Talfourd, Procter and Macready; he refers to him as "kind-hearted Janus;" and in 1831, when Moxon was taking over the *Englishman's Magazine*, he recommended Janus as a contributor—not knowing, I imagine, that England had then become too hot for that voluptuary.

In January, 1823, after Lamb had written of the death of Elia, Wainewright thus pleasantly addressed his ghost: "Sir Thomas Browne was a 'bosom cronie' of his—so was Burton, and old Fuller. In his amorous vein he dallied with that peerless Duchess of many-folio odour;—and with the hey-day comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher he induced light dreams. He would deliver critical touches on these like one inspired; but it was good to let him choose his own game:—if another began, even on the acknowledged pets, he was liable to interrupt—or rather append, in a mode difficult to define, whether as misapprehensive or mischievous. One night, at C——'s, the above dramatic partners were the temporary subject of chat. Mr. \* \* \* commended the passion and haughty style of a tragedy (I don't know which of them), but was instantly taken up by Elia; who told him, 'That was nothing,—the lyrics were the high things—the lyrics!'—and so having stricken \* \* \* with some amaze—he concluded with a brief intense eulogy on the 'Little Thief!'" Again: "By the bye our critics seem hardly aware of the intimate connexion, or rather of the identity, of the primal seeds of poetry and painting; nor that any true advancement in the serious study of one art co-generates a proportionate perfection in the other. If a man who did not feel Michel Agnolo should talk of his gusto for Milton, depend upon it he deceives one of two persons—you or himself:—so likewise *vice versâ*. The moment you entered Elia's room you would swear to his selection of authors, by his selection of framed prints—(Leonardos and Early Raffaellos)."

Here we may leave Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, painter, essayist, critic, forger, poisoner and friend of Charles Lamb. He died in 1852, in penal servitude, in Van Diemen's Land. His memory—the sweeter part—lives in Lamb's letters and the *London Magazine*; the other part in the annals of crime, in



Lytton's *Lucretia*, in Talfourd's *Final Memorials of Charles Lamb* (first edition), and in Dickens's *Hunted Down*.

Another contributor to the *London Magazine* known personally to Lamb was John Clare, the rural poet of Northamptonshire, who was to have been another Burns but succeeded only in being a better Bloomfield. Clare was published by Taylor & Hessey, his chief literary friend being Octavius Gilchrist, the antiquary and editor of old plays, who knew Clare before he came to London, and was permitted by his friend Gifford to review the Northamptonshire poet so favourably in the *Quarterly* as to make his fame. Clare had too facile a gift of versification, but many of his poems are marked by sweetness and rustic charm. Lamb wrote him two letters, which are preserved, and they exchanged books.

Clare's account of his meeting with Lamb is interesting: Lamb "was sitting with his tobacco-pipe and a great snuff-box on his left hand, into which he used to dip frequently. He was in outrageous spirits, and began to make puns 'on poets and hackney-coaches,' sipping from his tumbler all the time. At last Miss Lamb came in with good-natured expostulation, only to be met by Lamb's boisterous reply, 'Do we not know the value of a rustic swain—I mean of res—restraint?'"

It is not likely that Lamb and Clare were really intimate, but that they had at least one good evening together we know from Wainwright's article from which I have already quoted: "And first, then, for JOHN CLARE; for *first* doth he stand in the sixth volume. 'Princely Clare,' as Elia would call thee, some three hours after the cloth was drawn—Alas! good Clare, never again shall thou and he engage in those high combats, those wit-fights! Never shall his companionable draught cause thee an after-look of anxiety into the tankard!—no more shall he, pleasantly-malicious, make thy ears tingle, and thy cheeks glow, with the sound of that perplexing constraint! that conventional gagging-bill!—that Grammar!! till in the bitterness of thy heart thou cursedst Lindley Murray by all the stars.—Not once again shall thy sweetly-simple Doric phrase and accent beget the odious *pūn*. Thou mayest imbibe thy ale in peace, and defy Priscian unchecked,—Elia is gone!—Little didst thou think that evening would be the last, when thou and I, and two or three more, . . . parted with the humanity-loving Elia

beneath the chaste beams of the watery moon, warmed with his hearty cheer—the fragrant steam of his ‘*great plant*,’—his savoury conversation, and the genuine good-nature of his cousin Bridget gilding all. There was something solemn in the manner of our clasping palms,—it was first ‘hands round,’ then ‘hands across.’”<sup>1</sup>

Among other contributors whom Lamb esteemed were Allan Cunningham, the gigantic Scotch ballad writer, who had been contributing to the hostile *Blackwood* but joined the *London* and wrote for it “Tales of Lyddal Cross” and other stories, sketches and poems over the signature “Nalla”; George Darley, a shy stammering poet, the author of *Sylvia*, who criticised the modern drama adversely over the signature “John Lacy,” and contributed a series of “Dramaticles;” and John Hamilton Reynolds, Hood’s brother-in-law and collaborator, and the friend of Keats, who described lightly, over the signature “Edward Herbert,” various social events, and now and then played up gaily to Lamb’s humour.

Under Taylor, as I have said, the *London Magazine* steadily declined. Lamb’s letters give indication enough of the cause. One by one the principal contributors dropped away, “affronted” is Lamb’s word; Hazlitt, Procter, Wainewright all went; Lamb himself was losing interest. At the end of 1824 a special effort was made, the price was raised by a shilling, and Lamb began

<sup>1</sup> In some verses in the *London Magazine* for August, 1824, entitled “The Idler’s Epistle to John Clare,” by Elton, are the lines:—

Does Agnus fling his crotchets wild,  
“In wit a man,” in heart a child?—

Agnus being of course Lamb. And in Hone’s *Year Book*, for November 18th (1831), is this sonnet from Clare’s pen:—

TO CHARLES LAMB, ESQ.

Friend Lamb, thy choice was good, to love the lore  
Of our old by-gone bards, whose racy page,  
Rich mellowing Time makes sweeter than before.  
The blossom left—for the long garner’d store  
Of fruitage, now right luscious in its age,  
Although to fashion’s taste austere,—what more  
Can be expected from the popular rage  
For tinsel gauds that are to gold preferred?  
Me much it grieves, as I did erst presage,  
Vain fashion’s foils had every heart deterred  
From the warm, homely phrase of other days,  
Until thy Woodvil’s ancient voice I heard;  
And now right fain, yet fearing, honest bard,  
I pause to greet thee with so poor a praise.

to be busy once more, after some languid months. But the spirit had fled; and during the year 1825 the magazine was sold to Henry Southern and its career ceased to be worth study.

It was in the *London Magazine* for August, 1820, when Lamb was forty-five, that was printed the first of the essays which were to make his name a household word. This essay, a passage from which I have quoted in Chapter VI., was entitled "Recollections of the South-Sea House," where Lamb, as we have seen, had been a clerk in a very humble capacity in 1791-92. His first *Elia* essay, therefore, although he had probably fortified his youthful impressions by later visits to his brother's rooms at the South-Sea House, consisted very largely of material gathered when he was in his seventeenth year. It is I think probably unique for a man who all his life had meant to be a writer not to find himself until he was forty-five, and then to do so with material fetched from his teens.

The history of Lamb's pseudonym is told in a letter to John Taylor, the publisher, in July, 1821, in which he remarks, concerning his first essay—"having a brother now there [at the South-Sea House], and doubting how he might relish certain descriptions in it, I clapt down the name of *Elia* to it, which passed off pretty well, for *Elia* himself added the function of an author to that of a scrivener, like myself." Lamb adds: "I went the other day (not having seen him [*Elia*] for a year) to laugh over with him at my usurpation of his name, and found him alas! no more than a name, for he died of consumption eleven months ago, and I knew not of it. So the name has fairly devolved to me, I think; and 'tis all he has left me." All trace both of the original *Elia* and of his writings has vanished.<sup>1</sup>

Possibly in the circumstance that the pseudonym of *Elia* was adopted at all we may find a reason for the difference between the comparative thinness of Lamb's pre-*Elia*n writings and the *Elia*n richness and colour. There are some writers (paradoxical though it seems) who can never express themselves so freely as when, adopting a dramatic standpoint, they affect to be some one else. Goldsmith, who has affinity to Lamb, was always happier in his work when he imagined his pen to be held by another. The

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Cowden Clarke records in a marginal note to her copy of Procter's *Memoir* (which was recently lent to me) that Lamb once remarked that "*Elia*" formed an anagram of "a lie."



innocent imposture confers courage, disarms diffidence. We can easily believe that Lamb at first—in the opening essay on “The South-Sea House”—felt more at home in the assumed character of Elia than in his own person; the mere invention must have put him into merry pin. Later, of course, except when the time came to append his signature, he forgot Elia altogether, or rather assimilated him, retaining only what was identical with himself; but that does not affect the matter. It was Elia who broke the ice, and in such a business as a series of personal essays a favourable beginning is of the highest value.

Barry Cornwall suggests that Lamb had to be asked several times before he would consent to begin the *Elia* series. “He was himself eminently modest; he never put himself forward: he was always sought. He had much to say on many subjects, and he was repeatedly pressed to say this, before he consented to do so. He was almost teased into writing the *Elia* essays. . . . I know that high pay and frequent importunity failed to induce him to squander his strength in careless essays: he waited until he could give them their full share of meaning and humour.” Lamb’s payment for *Elia* was twenty guineas a sheet—or so he told Colburn—a sheet being sixteen pages. But Barry Cornwall states that he was paid two or three times the amount of the others, who received a pound a page. Lamb told Moore that he had received £170 for two years’ *Elia*. There seems to have been considerable delay in collecting Baldwin’s payments.

The life of Charles Lamb, as these pages testify, is the narrative of one who was a man and brother first, an East India clerk next, and a writer afterwards. Hence, although from time to time we have had and shall have glimpses of some of the finest intellects of his day—the sixty years between February, 1775, and December, 1834—the story is that rather of a private individual who chanced to have literary genius than of a man of letters in the ordinary sense of the term. The work of Charles Lamb forms no integral part of the history of English literature: he is not in the main current, he is hardly in the side current of the great stream. As that noble river flows steadily onward it brims here and there into a clear and peaceful bay. Of such tributary backwaters, which are of the stream yet not in it, Sir Thomas Browne is one, Charles Lamb another.

In other words, the *Essays of Elia* are perhaps as easily dis-

pensed with as any work of fancy and imagination in the language; and a large number of persons not uninterested in English literature attain to great heights of ignorance concerning them. Their "facts" are not of the utilitarian order; their humour leads rarely to loud laughter, rather to the quiet smile; they are not stories, they are not poems; they are not difficult enough to suggest "mental improvement" to those who count it loss unless they are puzzled, nor simple enough for those who demand of their authors no confounded nonsense.

At the same time English literature has nothing that in its way is better than *Elia's* best. The blend of sanity, sweet reasonableness, tender fancy, high imagination, sympathetic understanding of human nature, and humour, now wistful, now frolicsome, with literary skill of unsurpassed delicacy, makes *Elia* unique.

Yet it is still perhaps not clear why Lamb holds the place that is his in English literature and in our hearts. Why is *Elia* so treasured a volume? The answer, I hope, is to be read again and again between the lines of this book. I have failed utterly if it is not legible there. In a few words it is this—because Lamb describes with so much sympathy most of the normal feelings of mankind, because he understands so much, and is so cheering to the lowly, so companionable to the luckless. He is always on the side of those who need a friend. He is "in love with the green earth," he never soars out of reach, never withholds his tolerance for our weaknesses. A proverb has been called the wisdom of many and the wit of one: the definition may be extended to the *Essays of Elia*, in which the essentials of experiences common to us all are offered to each reader in terms peculiar to his own case. Hartley Coleridge wrote of his father's friend, that he always took things "by the better handle"—that, again, is why *Elia* stands so high upon the lists of books which some of us cannot do without.

It is by *Elia* that Lamb stands where he does: and our prose literature probably contains no work more steeped in personality. What Shakespeare's essays would have been like we cannot conjecture; what Lamb's plays were like we know; and the two men technically are not comparable. But in tolerance, in the higher cleanliness, in enjoyment of fun, in love of sweetness, in pleasure in gentlemen, in whimsical humour, Lamb and Shakespeare have

much in common. Lamb's criticisms of Shakespeare, though not necessarily better than those of certain other writers, always seem to me to come from one peculiarly qualified to speak by reason of superior intimacy or familiarity. He writes more as Shakespeare's friend than any other.<sup>1</sup>

Lamb found the essay a comparatively frigid thing; he left it warm and companionable. But he founded no school. Hazlitt may have done so, but not Lamb. This is because Hazlitt was in the direct line from Dryden, Addison, Steele, Goldsmith; Lamb was an individual sport. Hazlitt wrote the prose of his own day as well as he could; Lamb played many pranks, annihilated "Progress," in his own words wrote "for antiquity." To try to write like Lamb is perhaps the surest road to literary disaster; to try to write like Hazlitt is one of the best things a young man can do. Yet it is doubtful if Thackeray or Stevenson would have been quite the same had Lamb not come first.

From time to time I have already quoted some of the more personal and therefore the more exquisite passages of *Elia*, and as I shall have occasion to quote others, it is unnecessary here to lay emphasis upon the beauty, wisdom and humour of these essays. But as an example of Lamb's deliberate Elian method in contrast with his ordinary running epistolary manner, I might print the humorous letter to Barron Field concerning the thievishness of Australia, written in 1817, and follow it with a portion of the finished essay on the same theme written in 1822: another of the many proofs which we possess that Lamb always kept all his thoughts on a subject near at hand. This is from the letter:—

"Well, and how does the land of thieves use you? and how do you pass your time in your extra-judicial intervals? Going about the streets with a lantern, like Diogenes, looking for an honest man? You may look long enough, I fancy. Do give me some notion of the manners of the inhabitants where you are. They don't thieve all day long, do they? No human property could stand such continuous battery. And what do they do when they an't stealing?

"Have you got a theatre? What pieces are performed? Shakespear's, I

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<sup>1</sup> To speak thus of Lamb with his finished work before us is not a difficult task; but Leigh Hunt, I like to remember, had the prescience to say something of the kind some years before Lamb had thought of *Elia*. In reviewing Keats's *Poems* in the *Examiner* in 1817, Hunt refers to Lamb's "tact of humanity, his modest Shakespearian wisdom."



suppose—not so much for the poetry, as for his having once been in danger of leaving his country on account of certain ‘small deer.’

“Have you poets among you? Damn’d plagiarists, I fancy, if you have any. I would not trust an idea or a pocket-handkerchief of mine, among ’em. You are almost competent to answer Lord Bacon’s problem, whether a nation of atheists can subsist together. You are practically in one:—

“So thievish ’tis, that the eighth commandment itself  
Scarce seemeth there to be.”

This is from the essay:—

“I cannot image to myself whereabouts you are. When I try to fix it, Peter Wilkins’s island comes across me. Sometimes you seem to be in the *Hades of Thieves*. I see Diogenes prying among you with his perpetual fruitless lantern. What must you be willing by this time to give for the sight of an honest man! You must almost have forgotten how *we* look. And tell me, what your Sydneyites do? are they th\*\*v\*ng all day long? Merciful heaven! what property can stand against such a depredation! The kangaroos—your Aborigines—do they keep their primitive simplicity un-Europe-tainted, with those little short fore-puds, looking like a lesson framed by nature to the pick-pocket! Marry, for diving into fobs they are rather lamely provided *à priori*; but if the hue and cry were once up, they would show as fair a pair of hind-shifters as the expertest loco-motor in the colony.—We hear the most improbable tales at this distance. Pray, is it true that the young Spartans among you are born with six fingers, which spoils their scanning?—It must look very odd; but use reconciles. For their scansion, it is less to be regretted, for if they take it into their heads to be poets, it is odds but they turn out, the greater part of them, vile plagiarists.—Is there much difference to see to between the son of a th\*\*f, and the grandson? or where does the taint stop? Do you bleach in three or in four generations?—I have many questions to put, but ten Delphic voyages can be made in a shorter time than it will take to satisfy my scruples.—Do you grow your own hemp?—What is your staple trade, exclusive of the national profession, I mean? Your lock-smiths, I take it, are some of your great capitalists.”

That shows us something of Lamb’s manner of relishing a joke, turning it to view it from every side, missing the light from no facet. It shows us also the pains that went to the perfecting of a period. Lamb was indeed as careful a writer as we have had, and in a peculiar degree responsible for his words.

There is no lack of good criticism of *Elia* from which to select praises. I content myself with three passages, beginning with a heightened passage in a letter from Landor to Leigh Hunt’s *London Journal*, in 1835, which, I think, has not been reprinted, and a beautiful appreciation by Mr. Swinburne, who has always written nobly of Charles Lamb.

This is Landor: “We have swept into another room the

frillery of Gibbon, the inflexible pluck that overloaded the distorted muscles of Johnson, and the broken trinkets, the inextricable inanities, the ancient dust and recent cobweb, of Harris and Monboddo. We come again into the open air and see Old England all around us. Thanks to Goldsmith! thanks to Southey! thanks in the highest Heavens to Charles Lamb! The *Essays of Elia* will afford a greater portion of pure delight to the intellectual and the virtuous, to all who look into the human heart for what is good and graceful in it, whether near the surface or below, than any other two prose volumes, modern or ancient."

And this is Mr. Swinburne: "As many talk of Robin Hood who never shot in his bow, so do many talk of Charles Lamb who have never entered in spirit into the homely and happy sanctuary of his more private or inward presence. But for all who love him the charm of that companionship is alike indefinable and incomparable. It pervades his work as with an odour of sweet old-world flowers or spices long laid by among fine linens and rare brocades in some such old oaken or cedarn cabinet as his grandmother might have opened to rejoice the wondering senses of her boyish visitor at 'Blakesmoor.' His own words may best express the special feeling of tenderness and delight, familiar reverence and satisfied affection, which the very sound or thought of his 'gentle name' wakes up always anew within us into warmth and freshness of life. 'The names of some of our poets,' avows Elia in one of his last essays, with a graceful touch of apology for the fanciful confession, 'sound sweeter, and have a finer relish to the ear—to mine, at least—than that of Milton or of Shakespeare. It may be, that the latter are more staled and rung upon in common discourse. The sweetest names, and which carry a perfume in the mention, are, Kit Marlowe, Drayton, Drummond of Hawthornden, and Cowley.' And even so do we now find a homely magic in the name of Lamb, a special fragrance in the fame of it, such as hardly seems to hang about the statelier sound of Coleridge's or Wordsworth's or Shelley's.

"No good criticism of Lamb, strictly speaking, can ever be written; because nobody can do justice to his work who does not love it too well to feel himself capable of giving judgment on it. And if such a reader as this should undertake to enter the lists against any of Lamb's detractors, or to engage in debate with

any of his half-hearted and semi-supercilious partisans, he would doubtless find himself driven or tempted to break all bounds of critical reason in his panegyric of a genius so beloved. Question or denial of Lamb's dramatic powers might goad him on to maintain that *John Woodvil* is the only tragedy in the language which may properly be set beside *Hamlet*, and *The Wife's Trial* the one comedy which may hold its own if compared with *Much Ado about Nothing*. Let me not be suspected of any desire to maintain this thesis if I avow my enjoyment and admiration of Lamb's tragedy, his comedy, and his farce. Of his essays and letters, humorous or pathetic, prosaic or fantastic, erratic or composed, what is there to be said but that it would be a feat far easier to surpass all others than to approach the best of these? But the truth is simple and indisputable that no labour could be at once so delightful and so useless, so attractive and so vain, as the task of writing in praise of Lamb. Any man or any child who can feel anything of his charm utters better praise of him in silence than any array of epithets or periods could give. Any man or any woman who can feel nothing of his charm is outside the pale of any possible influence or impression from any reasoning or any enthusiasm of others."

I should like to close this chapter by quoting from Walter Pater's *Appreciations* a passage of delicate analysis of the mind of *Elia*: "Seeing things always by the light of an understanding more entire than is possible for ordinary minds, of the whole mechanism of humanity, and seeing also the manner, the outward mode or fashion, always in strict connexion with the spiritual condition which determined it, a humourist such as Charles Lamb anticipates the enchantment of distance; and the characteristics of places, ranks, habits of life, are transfigured for him, even now and in advance of time, by poetic light; justifying what some might condemn as mere sentimentality, in the effort to hand on unbroken the tradition of such fashion or accent. 'The praise of beggars,' 'the cries of London,' the traits of actors just grown 'old,' the spots in 'town' where the country, its fresh green and fresh water, still lingered on, one after another, amidst the bustle; the quaint, dimmed, just played-out farces, he had relished so much, coming partly through them to understand the earlier English theatre as a thing once really alive; those fountains and sun-dials of old gardens, of which he entertains such dainty dis-





ΕΛΙΑ  
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ΕΛΙΑ

FROM THE FIRST SKETCH BY DANIEL MATHIE, 1857, CRASER'S MAGAZINE.



course:—he feels the poetry of these things, as the poetry of things old indeed, but surviving as an actual part of the life of the present, and as something quite different from the poetry of things flatly gone from us and antique, which come back to us, if at all, as entire strangers, like Scott's old Scotch-border personages, their oaths and armour. Such gift of appreciation depends, as I said, on the habitual apprehension of men's life as a whole—its organic wholeness, as extending even to the least things in it—of its outward manner in connexion with its inward temper; and it involves a fine perception of the congruities, the musical accordance between humanity and its environment of custom, society, personal intercourse; as if all this, with its meetings, partings, ceremonies, gesture, tones of speech, were some delicate instrument on which an expert performer is playing.

“These are some of the characteristics of Elia, one essentially an essayist, and of the true family of Montaigne, ‘never judging,’ as he says, ‘system-wise of things, but fastening on particulars;’ saying all things as it were on chance occasion only, and by way of pastime, yet succeeding thus, ‘glimpse-wise,’ in catching and recording more frequently than others ‘the gayest, happiest attitude of things;’ a casual writer for dreamy readers, yet always giving the reader so much more than he seemed to propose. There is something of the follower of George Fox about him, and the Quaker's belief in the inward light coming to one passive, to the mere wayfarer, who will be sure at all events to lose no light which falls by the way—glimpses, suggestions, delightful half-apprehensions, profound thoughts of old philosophers, hints of the innermost reason in things, the full knowledge of which is held in reserve; all the varied stuff, that is, of which genuine essays are made.

“And with him, as with Montaigne, the desire of self-portraiture is, below all more superficial tendencies, the real motive in writing at all—a desire closely connected with that intimacy, that modern subjectivity, which may be called the *Montaignesque* element in literature. What he designs is to give you himself, to acquaint you with his likeness; but must do this, if at all, indirectly, being indeed always more or less reserved, for himself and his friends; friendship counting for so much in his life, that he is jealous of anything that might jar or disturb it, even to the length of a sort of insincerity, to which he assigns its quaint



‘praise;’ this lover of stage plays significantly welcoming a little touch of the artificiality of play to sweeten the intercourse of actual life.”

Let me end this chapter by ~~remarking~~ <sup>noting</sup> that it is significant of the universality — and particularity — of *Elia* that every one thinks that he knows Lamb a little more intimately, and appreciates him a little more subtly, than any one else.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

CHARLES LAMB IN *ELIA*SONNET TO *ELIA*

Thou gentle Spirit, sweet and pure and kind,—  
 Though strangely witted—"high fantastical"—  
 Who clothest thy deep feelings in a pall  
 Of motley hues, that twinkle to the mind,  
 Half hiding, and yet heightening, what's enshrined  
 Within;—who, by a power unknown to all  
 Save thee, canst bring up at a call  
 A thousand seeming opposites, entwined  
 In wondrous brotherhood—fancy, wild wit,  
 Quips, cranks, and wiles, with deep sweet thought,  
 And stinging jests, with honey for the wound;  
 All blent in intermixture full and fit,—  
 A banquet for the choicest souls:—Can aught  
 Repay the solace which from thee I've found!

JOHN HUNTER, in *Friendship's Offering*, 1832.

**P**ASSING from the question of literary excellence, there are <sup>two</sup> ~~three~~ of the essays of *Elia* which seem to call for intimate consideration by reason of their bearing upon their author's character: "New Year's Eve," written at the end of 1820; ~~"Imperfect Sympathies," written in 1821~~, and the "Character of the Late *Elia*," written at the end of 1822, at a time when Lamb had tired of the work and made pretence that *Elia* was no more. Lamb never wrote a line that does not tell us something of himself—he is one of the most autobiographical authors in English literature, directly and indirectly—but if we would come quickly to know him these three essays are indispensable. I begin with "New Year's Eve":—

"That I am fond of indulging, beyond a hope of sympathy, in such retrospection, may be the symptom of some sickly idiosyncrasy. Or is it owing to another cause; simply, that being without wife or family, I have not learned to project myself enough out of myself; and having no offspring of my own to dally with I turn back upon memory, and adopt my own early idea, as my heir and favourite? . . .

"I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived; I, and my friends: to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer. I do not want to be weaned by age; or drop, like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave.—Any alteration, on this earth of mine, in diet or in lodging, puzzles and discomposes me. My household-gods plant a terrible fixed foot, and are not rooted up without blood. They do not willingly seek Lavinian shores. A new state of being staggers me.

"Sun, and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candle-light, and fire-side conversations, and innocent vanities, and jests, and *irony itself*—do these things go out with life?

"Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides, when you are pleasant with him?

"And you, my midnight darlings, my Folios! must I part with the intense delight of having you (huge armfuls) in my embraces? Must knowledge come to me, if it come at all, by some awkward experiment of intuition, and no longer by this familiar process of reading?

"Shall I enjoy friendships there, wanting the smiling indications which point me to them here,—the recognisable face—the 'sweet assurance of a look——?'"

Much of Lamb is there: his reverence for his early recollections, his comfort in daily life and human intercourse, his love of books, his wistful desire for friendship. Few men with so much imagination and tenderness have had less of the mystic. For him the unknown might remain unknown: he rested on the security of fact. The earth was his best friend, and especially so where it blossomed into a city.

The superficial pessimism and agnosticism of this essay led to protests both public and private, among them a poem of remonstrance by Charles Abraham Elton, in the *London Magazine*, signed "Olen." The poem, which was a long one, reasoned gently but firmly with Elia's unhappy scepticism, it set up a cheerful Christian certainty in place of Lamb's wistful hesitations, and finally offered him this picture of the bliss that was, if he only knew it, awaiting him:—

Thou shalt be human still; and thou shalt be  
 (Thine eyes then clear'd with Eden's euphrasy)  
 Within the sight and touch of him who told  
 The tale our babes now read; Ulysses old  
 Ploughing with homeward keel romantic seas;  
 Whether, indeed, blind *Melesigenes*  
 Greet thee, or bards to whom alike belongs  
 That hoar abstraction of Troy's scatter'd songs:  
 And thou shalt hail that prophet of his kind,  
*Shakspeare*, the man of multitudinous mind:



And she, to thee first lovely and first fair,  
Thy *Alice*—she, thy *Alice*, shall be there ;  
A woman still, though pure from mortal leaven,  
And warm as love, though blushing all of heaven.

Writing to John Taylor, then editor of the *London*, concerning the consolatory orthodoxy of these verses, Lamb remarked : “ Poor Elia . . . does not pretend to so very clear revelations of a future state of being as Olen seems gifted with. He stumbles about dark mountains at best ; but he knows at least how to be thankful for this life, and is too thankful indeed for certain relationships lent him here, not to tremble for a possible resumption of the gift. He is too apt to express himself lightly, and cannot be sorry for the present occasion, as it has called forth a reproof so Christian-like.” Allsop quotes Coleridge as once saying : “ No, no ; Lamb’s scepticism has not come lightly, nor is he a sceptic. The harsh reproof to Godwin for his contemptuous allusion to Christ before a well-trained child, proves that he is not a sceptic. His mind, never prone to analysis, seems to have been disgusted with the hollow pretences, the false reasonings, and absurdities of the rogues and fools with which all establishments, and all creeds seeking to become established, abound. I look upon Lamb as one hovering between earth and heaven ; neither hoping much nor fearing anything. It is curious that he should retain many usages which he learnt or adopted in the fervour of his early religious feelings, now that his faith is in a state of suspended animation. Believe me, who know him well, that Lamb, say what he will, has more of the *essentials* of Christianity than ninety-nine out of a hundred professing Christians. He has all that would still have been Christian had Christ never lived or been made manifest upon earth.”<sup>1</sup>

30 \* In the “ Character of the Late Elia ” Lamb thus describes himself :—

“ My late friend was in many respects a singular character. Those who did not like him, hated him ; and some, who once liked him, afterwards became his bitterest haters. The truth is, he gave himself too little concern what he uttered, and in whose presence. He observed neither time nor place, and would e’en out with what came uppermost. With the severe religionist he would pass for a free-thinker ; while the other faction set him down for a bigot, or persuaded themselves that he belied his sentiments. Few understood him ; and I am not certain that at all times he quite understood himself. He too much affected that dangerous

<sup>1</sup> Crabb Robinson writes, in his *Reminiscences* : “ Lamb was a man of ‘ natural piety ’ and his supposed anti-religious language was in fact directed solely against the dogmatism of systematic theology—he had the spirit of devotion in his heart and the organ of theosophy in his skull.”

figure—irony. He sowed doubtful speeches, and reaped plain, unequivocal hatred.—He would interrupt the gravest discussion with some light jest; and yet, perhaps, not quite irrelevant in ears that could understand it. Your long and much talkers hated him. The informal habit of his mind, joined to an inveterate impediment of speech, forbade him to be an orator; and he seemed determined that no one else should play that part when he was present.

“He was *petit* and ordinary in his person and appearance. I have seen him sometimes in what is called good company, but where he has been a stranger, sit silent, and be suspected for an odd fellow; till some unlucky occasion provoking it, he would stutter out some senseless pun (not altogether senseless perhaps, if rightly taken), which has stamped his character for the evening. It was hit or miss with him; but nine times out of ten, he contrived by this device to send away a whole company his enemies. His conceptions rose kindlier than his utterance, and his happiest *impromptus* had the appearance of effort. He has been accused of trying to be witty, when in truth he was but struggling to give his poor thoughts articulation.

“He chose his companions for some individuality of character which they manifested.—Hence, not many persons of science, and few professed *literati*, were of his councils. They were, for the most part, persons of an uncertain fortune; and, as to such people commonly nothing is more obnoxious than a gentleman of settled (though moderate) income, he passed with most of them for a great miser. To my knowledge this was a mistake. His *intimados*, to confess a truth, were in the world’s eye a ragged regiment. He found them floating on the surface of society; and the colour, or something else, in the weed pleased him. The burrs stuck to him—but they were good and loving burrs for all that. He never greatly cared for the society of what are called good people. If any of these were scandalised (and offences were sure to arise), he could not help it. When he has been remonstrated with for not making more concessions to the feelings of good people, he would retort by asking, what one point did these good people ever concede to him?

“He was temperate in his meals and diversions, but always kept a little on this side of abstemiousness. Only in the use of the Indian weed he might be thought a little excessive. He took it, he would say, as a solvent of speech. Marry—as the friendly vapour ascended, how his prattle would curl up sometimes with it! the ligaments which tongue-tied him, were loosened, and the stammerer proceeded a statit! . . .

“He had a general aversion from being treated like a grave or respectable character, and kept a wary eye upon the advances of age that should so entitle him. He herded always, while it was possible, with people younger than himself. He did not conform to the march of time, but was dragged along in the procession. His manners lagged behind his years. He was too much of the boy-man. The *toga virilis* never sate gracefully on his shoulders. The impressions of infancy had burnt into him, and he resented the impertinence of manhood. These were weaknesses; but such as they were, they are a key to explicate some of his writings.”

The case is overstated in some respects, but Lamb is there. Probably no one ever hated him as he says they did. The only really hostile verdict upon Lamb is Thomas Carlyle’s, quoted on pages 638 and 641, and discounted, I hope, in the mind of every one. Lamb was accompanied ever by a familiar, an unmasker of

affectation, a normaliser, a restorer of sanity, which, perched upon his shoulder, prompted him to protest. At a funeral, where there is often a fashion of too much grief at a necessary process of nature, he laughed; at a musical soir e, where talk has a tendency to become too precious and rapture too vocal, he made puns; at a debate on German philosophy (~~as we shall see~~) he sang "Geuty, Geuty;" when hero-worship or foolish pretentiousness was too rank he chanted "Diddle Diddle Dumpkins," or carried a candle for the examination of bumps. He was ever adjusting balances, and was often misunderstood for his pains. Again, Lamb's sympathies were extraordinarily quick, and where sympathies are quick, antipathies are quick too. Aversions are as rapidly generated as preferences; and Lamb had only to suspect the presence of a mind out of tune with his own to be incited straightway to bewilder or irritate it, although his own character were blackened in the act. This was sheer mischief. Hatred he felt for no one, ~~except perhaps the Regent, and even for him he would have found extenuating circumstances had he met him. We have seen him telling Robinson that he could never hate any one that he had once seen.~~

One more extract from *Elia* :—

"There is an order [Lamb wrote, in "Imperfect Sympathies"] of imperfect intellects (under which mine must be content to rank) which in its constitution is essentially anti-Caledonian. The owners of the sort of faculties I allude to, have minds rather suggestive than comprehensive. They have no pretences to much clearness or precision in their ideas, or in their manner of expressing them. Their intellectual wardrobe (to confess fairly) has few whole pieces in it. They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth. She presents no full front to them—a feature or side-face at the most. Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays at a system, is the utmost they pretend to. They beat up a little game peradventure—and leave it to knottier heads, more robust constitutions, to run it down. The light that lights them is not steady and polar, but mutable and shifting: waxing, and again waning. Their conversation is accordingly. They will throw out a random word in or out of season, and be content to let it pass for what it is worth. They cannot speak always as if they were upon their oath—but must be understood, speaking or writing, with some abatement. They seldom wait to mature a proposition, but e'en bring it to market in the green ear. They delight to impart their defective discoveries as they arise, without waiting for their full developement. They are no systematizers, and would but err more by attempting it. Their minds, as I said before, are suggestive merely."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That was written in 1821. As early as 1799, when he was twenty-four (as Pater recalls), Lamb had told Southey, in a letter, that he "never judged system-wise of things, but fastened upon particulars."



My object in quoting in this book so much from Lamb's letters and essays has been to let his character unfold itself naturally. I do not want to attempt any formal estimate here; but I should like to take from two at least of his friends passages supplementing his own remarks. Thomas Hood, who had several points in common with Lamb, supports the "familiar" theory. "As he once owned to me, he was fond of antagonising. Indeed in the sketch of himself, prefacing the last Essays of Elia, . . . he says: 'With the Religionist I pass for a Free-thinker, while the other faction set me down for a Bigot.' In fact, no politician ever laboured more to preserve the Balance of Power in Europe, than he did to correct any temporary preponderances. He was always *trimming* in the nautical, not the political, sense. Thus, in his 'magnanimous letter,' as Hazlitt called it, to High Church Southey, he professed himself a Unitarian. With a Catholic, he would probably have called himself a Jew; as amongst Quakers, by way of a set-off against their own formality, he would indulge in a little extra levity. I well remember his chuckling at having spirited on his correspondent Bernard Barton, to commit some little enormities, such as addressing him as C. Lamb, *Esquire*. . . .

"If he was intolerant of anything, it was of Intolerance. He would have been (if the foundation had existed, save in the fiction of Rabelais), of the Utopian order of Thelemites, where each man under scriptural warrant did what seemed good in his own eyes. He hated evil-speaking, carping, and petty scandal. On one occasion having slipped out an anecdote, to the discredit of a literary man, during a very confidential conversation, the next moment, with an expression of remorse, for having impaired even my opinion of the party, he bound me solemnly to bury the story in my own bosom. In another case he characteristically rebuked the backbiting spirit of a censorious neighbour. Some Mrs. Candour telling him, in expectation of an ill-natured comment, that Miss \*\*\*, the teacher at the Ladies' School, had married a publican. 'Has she so?' said Lamb, 'then I'll have my beer there!'"

"There was a notion prevalent about Lamb," says De Quincey, "which I can affirm to have been a most erroneous one; it was—that any flagrant act of wickedness formed a recommendation to his favour. 'Ah!' said one man to me, when asking a letter of introduction from him, 'ah! that I could but recommend you

as a man that had robbed the mail, or the King's exchequer—which would be better. In that case, I need not add a word ; you would take rank instantly amongst the privileged friends of Lamb, without a word from me.' Now, as to '*the King's exchequer*,' I cannot say. A man who should have placed himself in relation with Falstaff by obeying his commands at a distance of four centuries (like the traveller who demanded of the turnpikeman,—'How do you like your eggs dressed?' and, ten years after, on passing the same gate, received the monosyllabic reply, '*poached!*'), that man might have presented irresistible claims to Lamb's affection. Shakspeare, or anything connected with Shakspeare, might have proved too much for his Roman virtue. But, putting aside any case so impossible as this, I can affirm that—so far from this being the truth, or approaching the truth—a rule the very opposite governed Lamb's conduct. So far from welcoming wicked, profligate, or dissolute people by preference if they happened to be clever—he bore with numerous dull people, stupid people, asinine people, for no other reason upon earth than because he knew them, or believed them, to have been ill-used or oppressed by some clever but dissolute man. That was enough."

De Quincey continues: "Perhaps the foundation for the false notion I have mentioned about Lamb's predilections was to be found in his carelessness for those social proscriptions which have sometimes occurred in our stormy times with respect to writers, male and female, who set the dominant notions, or the prevailing feelings of men—(feelings with regard to sexual proprieties, to social distinctions, to the sanctity of property, to the sanctity of religious formulæ, &c., &c.)—at open defiance. Take, for example, Thelwall at one time, Holcroft, Godwin, Mrs. Wolstonecraft, Dr. Priestley, Hazlitt ; all of whom were, more or less, in a backward or inverse sense, *tabooed*—that is, consecrated to public hatred and scorn. With respect to all these persons, feeling that the public alienation had gone too far, or had begun originally upon false grounds, Lamb threw his heart and his doors wide open. Politics—what cared he for politics? Religion, in the sense of theological dogmas—what cared he for religion? For religion in its moral aspects, and its relations to the heart of man, no human being ever cared more. With respect to politics, some of his friends could have wished him to hate men when they grew *anti-national*, and in that case only ; but he would not. He persisted in liking men

who made an idol of Napoleon, who sighed over the dread name of Waterloo, and frowned upon Trafalgar."

With infinite detail and some sorrow De Quincey tells how Lamb refused to share in the national excitement when Blucher visited England in 1814. "One might have thought that, if he manifested no sympathy in a direct shape with the primary cause of the public emotion, still he would have sympathized, in a secondary way, with the delirious joy which every street, every alley, then manifested, to the ear as well as to the eye. But no! Still, like Diogenes, he threw upon us all a scoffing air, as of one who stands upon a pedestal of eternity, looking down upon those who share in the transitory feelings of their own age. How he felt in the following year, when the mighty drama was consummated by Waterloo, I cannot say, for I was not then in London: I guess, however, that he would have manifested pretty much the same cynical contempt for us children of the time that he did in all former cases."

Lamb, of course, cared for none of these things, having his own world to live in; nor does he record his feelings on the downfall of Napoleon (so tragic an event to Hazlitt) except in the sentence to Southey, quoted in Chapter XXX.: "After all, Buonaparte is a fine fellow, as my barber says, and I should not mind standing bareheaded at his table to do him service in his fall." Lamb had too much sympathy to share in any loud triumph over the defeat of a great man, however dangerous: too much fidelity to the doctrine of live and let live, springing from that toleration which led him always to think of the provocation at the same time as the crime, of the strength of the temptation in conjunction with the weakness of the tempted. He saw man always as a creature of good and evil in conflict. It was he who said, after one of Hazlitt's lapses from right citizenship, "No, he is not a bad man, but he commits bad actions"—a verdict of singular kindness and discrimination. Such minds make very poor statesmen but superb recording angels.

Hazlitt, we are told, was inclined to despise Lamb's tolerance as weakness. He wanted all men to take sides and defend them even to the point of bitterness. And Procter, as we have seen, speaks of Lamb's change of manner to suit each guest, not indeed with disapproval, but with a suggestion that one manner for all were the finer way. But Hazlitt's criticism argues an incapacity



to appreciate the Shakespearian humour of which Lamb was the possessor, the breadth of mind that finds room for all; while Procter ignores the fact that Lamb probably considered it his duty as a host to make each person present as happy as might be. But if Procter (as I am sure he did not intend) gives any one the impression that Lamb was wanting in courage, that impression is wrong. Lamb's courage was whole. He was not naturally a fighter; his tolerance and sympathetic imagination made few things wholly obnoxious to him; knowing much, he forgave much; but he never hesitated to speak out when occasion called, as we know from his letters and his published writings. His note on the Jew in the *Dramatic Specimens*, appended to the extract from Marlowe's "Rich Jew of Malta" (see page 290), could have been written only by a fearless man. His epigrams against the Regent were dictated by a fine scorn, careless of risk. His championship of Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt in the "Letter to Southey" (to which we are coming) was a deliberate invitation to unpopularity which few literary men would have put forth. His rebuke of the Unitarians, in an open letter in 1825, for making use of the privileges of the Established Church of which they disapproved, and salving their conscience with an empty protest, was compact of high moral courage and indignation.

But what I think the study of the writings of Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb shows perhaps most noticeably and remarkably, is their extraordinary honesty. They never permitted themselves to deceive. They instantly detected what was genuine, both in their fellow creatures and in art, and never wavered in their fidelity to it. They allowed no misunderstandings. Lamb in his best spirits was full of "bams" and roguishness, but when it came to essentials his attitude was firm and unequivocal. Both he and his sister made up their minds for themselves and allowed nothing to prejudice them. If it were necessary, as Mary Lamb says in a letter on page 286, they would quarrel with any one's brother. Amid the fun and mischief, the tenderness and humour, the eloquence and pathos of the *Elia* essays, one is continually conscious of a mind inflexibly true to itself and its ideals, a passionate friend of truth in all things.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

1821

Lamb's Golden Year—Sarah Burney's Wedding—An Evening with Charles Mathews—At Margate with the Novellos—Lamb and Mrs. Barbauld—De Quincey at Great Russell Street—Lamb Asleep—"Diddle, Diddle, Dumpkins"—In Praise of Hazlitt—Julius Hare and Lamb.

THE year 1820 saw the Essays of Elia projected, but it was in 1821 that the best of those essays were written. It was Lamb's golden year, containing, among others, "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," "My Relations," "Mackery End in Hertfordshire," "Imperfect Sympathies," "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," "Witches and other Night Fears," "My First Play" and "Dream Children." I would mention also "The Old and the New Schoolmaster" for its very minute and accurate account of Lamb's curious brain, and for Mary Lamb's contribution to its close. With some of these essays we are already familiar; to others we shall come later.

The first of the few letters of 1821 is to Dorothy Wordsworth, on January 8th, and it refers to the essay on "New Year's Eve": "I am glad you liked my new year's speculations. Everybody likes them, except the Author of the Pleasures of Hope.<sup>1</sup> Disappointment attend him! How I like to be liked, and *what I do* to be liked! They flatter me in magazines, newspapers, and all the minor reviews. The Quarterlies hold aloof. But they must come into it in time, or their leaves be waste paper."

Crabb Robinson again helps us:—

"January 20th, 1821:—I read to him [Flaxman] while he was drawing, Lamb on New Year's Day—an article I ought not to have read to him, for the literary merit could not destroy the impression produced by so *unreligious* an effusion.

"February 21st:—I took these [Raphael's Planets, engraved by Dorigny] to Lamb . . . but L. did not seem heartily to enjoy

<sup>1</sup>Lamb does not mean that Campbell did not like them. He merely refers jestingly to their hopelessness.

them. On the contrary, taking them to Aders', they were delighted with them. On the other hand, bringing back to Lamb the Bible of Raphael, L., and also Hazlitt, who was there, agreed in declaring these to be among the finest works of Raphael. H. and I now speak again but he does not omit the *Sir* when he talks to me.

"March 3rd:—Another morning of calls. The only one interesting on Miss Lamb. C. L. seems to have felt acutely poor Scott's death. [John Scott, editor of the *London Magazine*.] Talfourd was thinking of applying for the editorship but C. L. agreed with me in thinking it incompatible with his profession. . . . I spent the evening at Lamb's, chiefly playing picquet with Miss L. while C. L. read."

In April of this year the quiet routine of Mary Lamb's life was broken by the excitement of a wedding, when Sarah Burney, the daughter of Rear-Admiral Burney, was married to her cousin John Payne. Lamb described the event very charmingly in an essay which was not, however, printed until four years had passed. He probably did not really give away the bride, because the register shows that her father was present. "I do not know [he wrote] when I have been better pleased than at being invited last week to be present at the wedding of a friend's daughter. I like to make one at these ceremonies, which to us old people give back our youth in a manner, and restore our gayest season, in the remembrance of our own success, or the regrets, scarcely less tender, of our own youthful disappointments, in this point of a settlement. On these occasions I am sure to be in good-humour for a week or two after, and enjoy a reflected honey-moon. Being without a family, I am flattered with these temporary adoptions into a friend's family; I feel a sort of cousinhood, or uncleship, for the season; I am inducted into degrees of affinity; and, in the participated socialities of the little community, I lay down for a brief while my solitary bachelorship. I carry this humour so far, that I take it unkindly to be left out, even when a funeral is going on in the house of a dear friend. . . .

"I do not know what business I have to be present in solemn places. I cannot divest me of an unseasonable disposition to levity upon the most awful occasions. I was never cut out for a public functionary. Ceremony and I have long shaken hands; but I could not resist the importunities of the young lady's father,



whose gout unhappily confined him at home, to act as parent on this occasion, and *give away the bride*. Something ludicrous occurred to me at this most serious of all moments—a sense of my unfitness to have the disposal, even in imagination, of the sweet young creature beside me. I fear I was betrayed to some lightness, for the awful eye of the parson—and the rector's eye of Saint Mildred's in the Poultry [really St. Margaret's, Westminster] is no trifle of a rebuke—was upon me in an instant, souring my incipient jest to the tristful severities of a funeral.

“This was the only misbehaviour which I can plead to upon this solemn occasion, unless what was objected to me after the ceremony by one of the handsome Miss T——'s, be accounted a solecism. She was pleased to say that she had never seen a gentleman before me give away a bride in black. Now black has been my ordinary apparel so long—indeed I take it to be the proper costume of an author—the stage sanctions it—that to have appeared in some lighter colour would have raised more mirth at my expense, than the anomaly had created censure. But I could perceive that the bride's mother, and some elderly ladies present (God bless them!) would have been well content, if I had come in any other colour than that. But I got over the omen by a lucky apologue, which I remembered out of Pilpay, or some Indian author, of all the birds being invited to the linnets' wedding, at which, when all the rest came in their gayest feathers, the raven alone apologised for his cloak because ‘he had no other.’ . . .

“My friend the admiral was in fine wig and buckle on this occasion—a striking contrast to his usual neglect of personal appearance. He did not once shove up his borrowed locks (his custom ever at his morning studies) to betray the few grey stragglers of his own beneath them. He wore an aspect of thoughtful satisfaction. I trembled for the hour, which at length approached, when after a protracted *breakfast* of three hours—if stores of cold fowls, tongues, hams, botargoes, dried fruits, wines, cordials, &c., can deserve so meagre an appellation—the coach was announced, which was come to carry off the bride and bridegroom for a season, as custom has sensibly ordained, into the country. . . . In this crisis, betwixt tarrying and departure, I must do justice to a foolish talent of mine, which had otherwise like to have brought me into disgrace in the fore-part of the day; I mean a power, in any emergency, of thinking and giving vent to all manner of strange nonsense. In

this awkward dilemma I found it sovereign. I rattled off some of my most excellent absurdities. All were willing to be relieved, at any expense of reason, from the pressure of the intolerable vacuum which had succeeded to the morning bustle. By this means I was fortunate in keeping together the better part of the company to a late hour: and a rubber of whist (the Admiral's favourite game) with some rare strokes of chance as well as skill, which came opportunely on his side—lengthened out till midnight—dismissed the old gentleman at last to his bed with comparatively easy spirits." As we shall see, the Admiral lived only until the following November.

In May the *London Magazine* printed the essay on "The Old and the New Schoolmaster," which, though not one of the richest of the series, is yet at the beginning so autobiographical that I must quote a little from it:—

I have no astronomy. I do not know where to look for the Bear, or Charles's Wain; the place of any star; or the name of any of them at sight. I guess at Venus only by her brightness—and if the sun on some portentous morn were to make his first appearance in the West, I verily believe, that, while all the world were gasping in apprehension about me, I alone should stand unterrified, from sheer incuriosity and want of observation. Of history and chronology I possess some vague points, such as one cannot help picking up in the course of miscellaneous study; but I never deliberately sat down to a chronicle, even of my own country. I have most dim apprehensions of the four great monarchies; and sometimes the Assyrian, sometimes the Persian, floats as *first* in my fancy. I make the widest conjectures concerning Egypt, and her shepherd kings. My friend *M.*, with great painstaking, got me to think I understood the first proposition in Euclid, but gave me over in despair at the second. I am entirely unacquainted with the modern languages; and, like a better man than myself, have "small Latin and less Greek." I am a stranger to the shapes and texture of the commonest trees, herbs, flowers—not from the circumstance of my being town-born—for I should have brought the same inobservant spirit into the world with me, had I first seen it in "on Devon's leafy shores,"—and am no less at a loss among purely town-objects, tools, engines, mechanic processes.—Not that I affect ignorance—but my head has not many mansions, nor spacious; and I have been obliged to fill it with such cabinet curiosities as it can hold without aching. I sometimes wonder, how I have passed my probation with so little discredit in the world, as I have done, upon so meagre a stock. But the fact is, a man may do very well with a very little knowledge, and scarce be found out, in mixed company; every body is so much more ready to produce his own, than to call for a display of your acquisitions. But in a *l'le-à-l'le* there is no shuffling. The truth will out. There is nothing which I dread so much, as the being left alone for a quarter of an hour with a sensible, well-informed man, that does not know me.

Lamb was not exaggerating. Nothing probably was more surprising to the average man than the things that Lamb did not know—except the things that he did.

On May 1st we have a note to Coleridge, in reply to an invitation from the Gillmans at Highgate, to meet Charles Mathews the actor. The dinner, which was on Friday, May 4th, was not quite so successful as had been hoped, or so we gather from the account of it in the memoir of Mathews by Mrs. Mathews, who, by the way, was a half-sister of Fanny Kelly. "Mr. Lamb's first approach was not prepossessing. His figure was small and mean; and no man certainly was ever less beholden to his tailor. His 'bran' new suit of black cloth (in which he affected several times during the day to take great pride and to cherish as a novelty that he had long looked for and wanted) was drolly contrasted with his very rusty silk stockings, shown from his knees, and his much too large *thick* shoes, without polish. His shirt rejoiced in a wide ill-plaited frill, and his very small, tight, white neckcloth was hemmed to a fine point at the ends that formed part of the little bow. His hair was black and sleek, but not formal, and his face the gravest I ever saw, but indicating great intellect and resembling very much the portraits of King Charles I. Mr. Coleridge was very anxious about his *pet* Lamb's first impression upon my husband, which I believe his friend saw; and guessing that he had been extolled, he mischievously resolved to thwart his panegyrist, disappoint the strangers, and altogether to upset the suspected plan of showing him off."

In June the Lambs were at Margate, where they received a visit from Charles Cowden Clarke, then living at Ramsgate, and some of the Novellos. Mrs. Cowden Clarke records, in *Recollections of Writers*: "It was while we were at Ramsgate that I remember hearing of Charles Lamb and his sister being at Margate for a 'sea change,' and I went over to see them. It seems as if it were but yesterday that I noted his eager way of telling me about an extraordinary large whale that had been captured there, of its having created lively interest in the place, of its having been conveyed away in a strong cart, on which it lay a huge mass of colossal height; when he added with one of his sudden droll penetrating glances:—the *eye* has just gone past our window."

I quote from Crabb Robinson again:—

"July 7th, 1821:—Dined hastily in Coleman Street, and then went to Mrs. Barbauld's, where I was soon joined by Mr. and Miss Lamb. This was a meeting I had brought about to gratify mutual curiosity. The Lambs are pleased with Mrs. Barbauld,



and therefore it is probable they have pleased her. Mrs. C. Aikin was there, and Miss Laurence. Lamb was chatty, and suited his conversation to his company, except that, speaking of Gilbert Wakefield, he said he had a peevish face. When he was told Mrs. Aikin was Gilbert Wakefield's daughter, he was vexed, but got out of the scrape tolerably well." Mrs. Barbauld was then seventy-eight and was living at Stoke Newington. The Lambs walked back with Robinson to Covent Garden.

"July 20th, 1821 :—Took tea and spent evening at Lamb's. Hazlitt there—little or no conversation between us. His fondness for his child (tho' it is a troubling and forward child) is a good feature in his character. We played whist and I staid late." Robinson then left London for the usual Circuit, duly followed by a long holiday, and we have therefore no more news of the Lambs until October, when Lamb tells Allsop that his sister has been ill and still remains so.

On October 26th came a sad blow—the death of John Lamb; but before saying more of that I should like to complete the record of 1821. We can then examine James Elia, as his brother called him, at leisure, at full length. I might merely add here the following passage from a letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to Crabb Robinson on November 24th, 1821 : "It gave us great concern to hear of the death of John Lamb. Though his brother and sister did not see very much of him the loss will be deeply felt; pray tell us particularly how they are; and give our kind love to them. I fear Charles's pen will be stopped for a time. What delightful papers he has lately written for that otherwise abominable magazine! The old King's Benchers is exquisite—indeed the only one I do not quite like is the Grace before Meat."

Another loss to the Lambs' circle came with the death of Captain, or rather Rear-Admiral, Burney, in November; which was in no way lightened by the difficulties in which Martin Burney found himself. Crabb Robinson's *Diary* has this entry : "Nov. 26th [1821] :—I called late on Lamb. I was sorry to learn that poor Burney has left his family unprovided for, and he spoke of Martin as very ill off in *every way*. This I have since learned referred to M. B.'s having some time back made a most foolish marriage. This had led to other misfortunes. Rickman had first turned him out of his situation under him and ultimately reduced his income. Miss L. has taken Mrs. M. B. under

her protection." In a letter from Mary Lamb to Mrs. Ayrton we see her busily at work in her efforts to amend the position of her old friend, to whom she must always have stood very much in the relation of a mother. It states that she has seen Mr. and Mrs. Rickman, and that Martin Burney was coming that day to frame a suitable letter to Rickman, with Charles Lamb's help. There are other signs in Crabb Robinson's *Diary* that poor Burney never prospered.

Writing to Rickman on November 20th, 1821, Lamb says that Admiral Burney's death would have been a greater shock to him but for the deaths of Jem White, and his brother John Lamb, which had somewhat "inured" him.

Before leaving 1821, I should like to refer to an evening at Great Russell Street during the year, which is described for us by De Quincey—partly in his "London Reminiscences," 1838, and partly in a review of Talfourd's biography in the *North British Review* for November, 1848. I quote from the later source: "There were no strangers; Charles Lamb, his sister, and myself made up the party. Even this was done in kindness. They knew that I should have been oppressed by an effort such as must be made in the society of strangers; and they placed me by their own fireside, where I could say as little or as much as I pleased.

"We dined about five o'clock, and it was one of the hospitalities inevitable to the Lambs, that any game which they might receive from rural friends in the course of the week, was reserved for the day of a friend's dining with them.

"In regard to wine, Lamb and myself had the same habit—perhaps it rose to the dignity of a principle—viz., to take a great deal *during* dinner—none *after* it. Consequently, as Miss Lamb (who drank only water) retired almost with the dinner itself, nothing remained for men of our principles, the rigour of which we had illustrated by taking rather too much of old port before the cloth was drawn, except talking; amœbæan colloquy, or, in Dr. Johnson's phrase, a dialogue of 'brisk reciprocation.' But this was impossible: over Lamb, at this period of his life, there passed regularly, after taking wine, a brief eclipse of sleep. It descended upon him as softly as a shadow. In a gross person, laden with superfluous flesh, and sleeping heavily, this would have been disagreeable; but in Lamb, thin even to meagreness,

spare and wiry as an Arab of the desert, or as Thomas Aquinas, wasted by scholastic vigils, the affection of sleep seemed rather a network of aerial gossamer than of earthy cobweb—more like a golden haze falling upon him gently from the heavens than a cloud exhaling upwards from the flesh. Motionless in his chair as a bust, breathing so gently as scarcely to seem certainly alive, he presented the image of repose midway between life and death, like the repose of sculpture; and to one who knew his history a repose affectingly contrasting with the calamities and internal storms of his life. I have heard more persons than I can now distinctly recall, observe of Lamb when sleeping—that his countenance in that state assumed an expression almost seraphic, from its intellectual beauty of outline, its childlike simplicity, and its benignity. It could not be called a transfiguration that sleep had worked in his face; for the features wore essentially the same expression when waking; but sleep spiritualized that expression, exalted it, and also harmonized it. Much of the change lay in that last process. The eyes it was that disturbed the unity of effect in Lamb's waking face. They gave a restlessness to the character of his intellect, shifting, like Northern Lights, through every mode of combination with fantastic playfulness, and sometimes by fiery gleams obliterating for the moment that pure light of benignity which was the predominant reading on his features."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> De Quincey's account continues thus: "On awaking from his brief slumber, Lamb sat for some time in profound silence, and then, with the most startling rapidity, sang out—'Diddle, diddle, dumpkins;' not looking at me, but as if soliloquizing. For five minutes he relapsed into the same deep silence; from which again he started up into the same abrupt utterance of—'Diddle, diddle, dumpkins.' I could not help laughing aloud at the extreme energy of this sudden communication, contrasted with the deep silence that went before and followed. Lamb smilingly begged to know what I was laughing at, and with a look of as much surprise as if it were I that had done something unaccountable, and not himself. I told him (as was the truth) that there had suddenly occurred to me the possibility of my being in some future period or other called on to give an account of this very evening before some literary committee. The committee might say to me—(supposing the case that I outlived him)—'You dined with Mr. Lamb in January, 1822; now, can you remember any remark or memorable observation which that celebrated man made before or after dinner?'

"I as *Respondent*. 'Oh yes, I can.'

"*Com.* 'What was it?'

"*Resp.* 'Diddle, diddle, dumpkins.'

"*Com.* 'And was this his only observation? Did Mr. Lamb not strengthen this remark by some other of the same nature?'

"*Resp.* 'Yes, he did.'

"*Com.* 'And what was it?'

"*Resp.* 'Diddle, diddle, dumpkins.'

"*Com.* 'What is your secret opinion of Dumpkins? Do you conceive Dumpkins to have been a thing or a person?'



The "London Reminiscences" tell us that Lamb's old habit of chaffing De Quincey was by no means abandoned. A grudging remark of De Quincey's as to Hazlitt's capacity not satisfying Lamb, he spared no pains to make his dissatisfaction known. "I know not," he said, "where you have been so lucky as to find finer thinkers than Hazlitt; for my part, I know of none such. You live, I think, or have lived, in Grasmere. Well, I was once there. I was at Keswick, and all over that wild

"*Resp.* 'I conceive Dumpkins to have been a person, having the rights of a person.'

"*Com.* 'Capable, for instance, of suing and being sued?'

"*Resp.* 'Yes, capable of both; though I have reason to think there would have been very little use in suing Dumpkins.'

"*Com.* 'How so? Are the Committee to understand that you, the Respondent, in your own case have found it a vain speculation, countenanced only by visionary lawyers, to sue Dumpkins?'

"*Resp.* 'No; I never lost a shilling by Dumpkins, the reason for which may be that Dumpkins never owed me a shilling; but from his *prænomen* of "diddle" I apprehend that he was too well acquainted with joint-stock companies.'

"*Com.* 'And your opinion is, that he may have diddled Mr. Lamb?'

"*Resp.* 'I conceive it to be not unlikely.'

"*Com.* 'And, perhaps, from Mr. Lamb's pathetic reiteration of his name, "Diddle, diddle," you would be disposed to infer that Dumpkins had practised his diddling talents upon Mr. L. more than once?'

"*Resp.* 'I think it probable.'

Lamb laughed, and brightened up; tea was announced; Miss Lamb returned. The cloud had passed away from Lamb's spirits, and again he realized the pleasure of evening, which, in *his* apprehension, was so essential to the pleasure of literature.

"On the table lay a copy of Wordsworth, in two volumes; it was the edition of Longman, printed about the time of Waterloo. Wordsworth was held in little consideration, I believe, amongst the house of Longman; at any rate, *their* editions of his works were got up in the most slovenly manner. In particular, the table of contents was drawn up like a short-hand bill of parcels. By accident the book lay open at a part of this table, where the sonnet beginning—

'Alas! what boots the long laborious quest'—

had been entered with mercantile speed, as—

'Alas! what boots,——'

"'Yes,' said Lamb, reading this entry in a dolorous tone of voice, 'he may well say *that*. I paid Hoby three guineas for a pair that tore like blotting paper, when I was leaping a ditch to escape a farmer that pursued me with a pitch-fork for trespassing. But why should W. wear boots in Westmorland? Pray, advise him to patronize shoes.'

Here I might perhaps add another story of Lamb's freakishness from an article in the *British Quarterly Review* for May, 1848:—"Gentle he undoubtedly was; and a gentle spirit lends its grace to all his writings. But there was also a whimsical recklessness which would occasionally beset him. To give an instance: He dined one day at the house of a friend of ours; and on entering the drawing-room after dinner, saw a gentleman standing in the middle of the room whose bent shoulders, in schoolboy leapfrog phrase, 'made a back'; the temptation was too great for Lamb, he placed his hands on the unconscious victim and flew over his head, to the astonished indignation of many and amusement of the few. This perhaps may be called a mere disregard to the proprieties of time and place; but Lamb was at times less excusably aggressive."

country ; yet none such could I find there. But, stay, there are the caves in your neighbourhood, as well as the lakes ; these we did not visit. No, Mary,' turning to his sister, 'you know we didn't visit the caves. So, perhaps, these great men live there. Oh ! yes, doubtless, they live in the caves of Westmorland. But you must allow for us poor Londoners. Hazlitt serves for *our* purposes. And in this poor, little, inconsiderable place of London, he is one of our very prime thinkers. But certainly I ought to have made an exception in behalf of the philosophers in the caves.' And thus he ran on, until it was difficult [De Quincey says] to know whether to understand him in jest or earnest." It was on this occasion that Lamb read to De Quincey Thurlow's sonnet on the heron and his own verses "The Three Graves."

A letter from Daniel Macmillan, the publisher, to the Rev. S. Watt, printed in Thomas Hughes's *Memoir of Daniel Macmillan*, 1882, gives another glimpse of Lamb and De Quincey, at what I imagine to have been a *London Magazine* dinner about the same time: "He [Julius Hare] spoke in the most affectionate manner of Charles Lamb. He dined with him and a large party of literati once. De Quincey was there. I dare say you know that De Q. is a very little man. Hare was sitting next to Lamb ; De Q. was on the opposite side of the table. Lamb touched Hare, and said, quite loud, so that the whole table might hear him, 'Do you see that little man ?' (pointing to De Q.), 'Well, though he is so little, he has written a thing about Macbeth better than anything I could write ;—no—not better than anything I could write, but I could not write anything better.' [Referring to the *London Magazine* essay on "The Knocking on the Gate in 'Macbeth.'"] Immediately afterwards he said to Hare, 'I am a very foolish fellow. For instance I have taken a fancy for you. I wish you would come and sup with me to-morrow night, I will give you a crab—perhaps lobster.' Hare says that two glasses of wine made him quite light—not tipsy, but elevated—so that the stories about his drunkenness, and the things he says of himself, are not to be trusted."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

## JOHN LAMB

LITTLE is known of Charles Lamb's brother John beyond the references in the early letters and a passage or so in Crabb Robinson's *Diary* (not much in his favour, except as coming from an inflexibly prejudiced critic of manners); but happily we have the whimsical yet sufficient character sketch of James Elia in the essay "My Relations," together with, to add a tender grace, the memories of John Lamb's boyhood in "Dream Children." To these materials I have been able to add a little, not indeed either essential or novel, but serving somewhat to amplify and fortify Charles Lamb's description.

John Lamb was born on June 5th, 1763, eighteen months before Mary Lamb and eleven and a half years before Charles. To Charles he was always the elder brother, even to the end, as the sonnet published in 1818 tells us:—

John, you were figuring in the gay career  
Of blooming manhood with a young man's joy,  
When I was yet a little peevish boy—  
Though time has made the difference disappear  
Betwixt our ages, which *then* seemed so great—  
And still by rightful custom you retain  
Much of the old authoritative strain,  
And keep the elder brother up in state.  
O! you do well in this. 'Tis man's worst deed  
To let the "things that have been" run to waste,  
And in the unmeaning present sink the past:  
In whose dim glass even now I faintly read  
Old buried forms, and faces long ago,  
Which you, and I, and one more, only know.

One critic at any rate has seen conscious irony in these lines; but I doubt if that were Lamb's intention. It was not in his nature to pillory a brother's selfishness in public.

This sonnet was not John Lamb's first appearance in a published poem. In the *Poetical Pieces on Several Occasions* by



John Lamb senior, printed in the first edition of this book, will be found a little versified “Letter from a child to his Grandmother,” in which John Lamb the less is supposed to address his grandam—Mrs. Field, I imagine, whose favourite, Charles Lamb tells us, John always was. The lines run:—

Dear Grandmam,  
 Pray to God to bless  
 Your grandson dear with happiness;  
 That as I do advance each year,  
 I may be taught my God to fear,  
 My little frame, from passion free,  
 To man's estate, from infancy;  
 From vice that leads a youth aside,  
 And to have wisdom for my guide,  
 That I may neither lie, nor swear,  
 But in the path of virtue steer,  
 My actions gen'rous, fair, and just,  
 Be always true unto my trust;  
 And then the Lord will ever bless  
 Your grandson dear,  
 John L—b the Less.

Where John Lamb went to school we do not know (possibly he too had instruction from Mr. William Bird), but that he was well read and a man of some culture we may feel confident. Samuel Salt was probably his sponsor at the South-Sea House, which we may suppose him to have entered in the early 1780's. It was just before the tragedy of 1796 that a stone fell on his foot and injured it seriously. In “Dream Children” Lamb speaks of the leg as having been amputated, but in his letters he remarks that Cruikshanks, the surgeon, hoped to save it. There is no other mention of John Lamb having lost the limb, the impression conveyed by “My Relations” being that physically he was abundantly sound and active. Lamb may have thrown the amputation into “Dream Children,” after his wont as a lover of mystification, and to save his character as a matter-of-lie man.

In 1796 John Lamb was thirty-three years of age; a comfortable bachelor in a good position, with opinions crystallised. The tragedy of September, as we have seen, put his character to the test, and found it wanting: Chapter IX. shows us how differently the man of thirty-three and his youthful brother of twenty-one viewed the responsibility thus suddenly thrown upon them. From that moment John Lamb settled down into a career independent of his family, and though friendly relations

were maintained, he seems to have remained independent to the end. Where he at first lived I do not discover, but in or about 1805, on succeeding John Tipp as Accountant of the South-Sea House, he took up his residence in a "fine suite of official rooms in Threadneedle Street" (to use his brother's words), and there he dwelt, I imagine, until his death; although I have seen it stated that, like his brother, he was pensioned off.

At this point comes fittingly Lamb's classic description of his brother, under the name of Cousin James Elia, in "My Relations," written in the spring of 1821.—"James is an inexplicable cousin. Nature hath her unities, which not every critic can penetrate; or, if we feel, we cannot explain them. The pen of Yorick, and of none since his, could have drawn J. E. entire—those fine Shandian lights and shades, which make up his story. I must limp after in my poor antithetical manner, as the fates have given me grace and talent. J. E. then—to the eye of a common observer at least—seemeth made up of contradictory principles.—The genuine child of impulse, the frigid philosopher of prudence—the phlegm of my cousin's doctrine is invariably at war with his temperament, which is high sanguine. With always some fire-new project in his brain, J. E. is the systematic opponent of innovation, and crier down of every thing that has not stood the test of age and experiment. With a hundred fine notions chasing one another hourly in his fancy, he is startled at the least approach to the romantic in others; and, determined by his own sense in every thing, commends *you* to the guidance of common sense on all occasions.—With a touch of the eccentric in all which he does, or says, he is only anxious that *you* should not commit yourself by doing any thing absurd or singular. On my once letting slip at table, that I was not fond of a certain popular dish, he begged me at any rate not to *say* so—for the world would think me mad. He disguises a passionate fondness for works of high art (whereof he hath amassed a choice collection), under the pretext of buying only to sell again—that his enthusiasm may give no encouragement to yours. Yet, if it were so, why does that piece of tender, pastoral Dominichino hang still by his wall?—is the ball of his sight much more dear to him?—or what picture-dealer can talk like him?

"Whereas mankind in general are observed to warp their speculative conclusions to the bent of their individual humours, *his*

theories are sure to be in diametrical opposition to his constitution. He is courageous as Charles of Sweden, upon instinct; chary of his person, upon principle, as a travelling Quaker.—He has been preaching up to me, all my life, the doctrine of bowing to the great—the necessity of forms, and manner, to a man’s getting on in the world. He himself never aims at either, that I can discover,—and has a spirit, that would stand upright in the presence of the Cham of Tartary. It is pleasant to hear him discourse of patience—extolling it as the truest wisdom—and to see him during the last seven minutes that his dinner is getting ready. Nature never ran up in her haste a more restless piece of workmanship than when she moulded this impetuous cousin—and Art never turned out a more elaborate orator than he can display himself to be, upon his favourite topic of the advantages of quiet, and contentedness in the state, whatever it may be, that we are placed in. He is triumphant on this theme, when he has you safe in one of those short stages that ply for the western road, in a very obstructing manner, at the foot of John Murray’s street—where you get in when it is empty, and are expected to wait till the vehicle hath completed her just freight—a trying three quarters of an hour to some people. He wonders at your fidgetiness,—‘where could we be better than we are, *thus sitting, thus consulting?*’—‘prefers, for his part, a state of rest to locomotion,’—with an eye all the while upon the coachman—till at length, waxing out of all patience, at *your want of it*, he breaks out into a pathetic remonstrance at the fellow for detaining us so long over the time which he had professed, and declares peremptorily, that ‘the gentleman in the coach is determined to get out, if he does not drive on that instant.’

“Very quick at inventing an argument, or detecting a sophistry, he is incapable of attending *you* in any chain of arguing. Indeed he makes wild work with logic; and seems to jump at most admirable conclusions by some process, not at all akin to it. Consonantly enough to this, he hath been heard to deny, upon certain occasions, that there exists such a faculty at all in man as *reason*; and wondereth how man came first to have a conceit of it—enforcing his negation with all the might of *reasoning* he is master of. He has some speculative notions against laughter, and will maintain that laughing is not natural to *him*—when peradventure the next moment his lungs shall crow like Chanticleer. He says some of the best things in the world—and declareth that wit is



his aversion. It was he who said, upon seeing the Eton boys at play in their grounds—*What a pity to think, that these fine ingenuous lads in a few years will all be changed into frivolous Members of Parliament!*

“His youth was fiery, glowing, tempestuous—and in age he discovereth no symptom of cooling. This is that which I admire in him. I hate people who meet Time half-way. I am for no compromise with that inevitable spoiler. While he lives, J. E. will take his swing.—It does me good, as I walk towards the street of my daily avocation, on some fine May morning, to meet him marching in a quite opposite direction, with a jolly handsome presence, and shining sanguine face, that indicates some purchase in his eye—a Claude—or a Hobbema—for much of his enviable leisure is consumed at Christie’s, and Phillips’s—or where not, to pick up pictures, and such gauds. On these occasions he mostly stoppeth me, to read a short lecture on the advantage a person like me possesses above himself, in having his time occupied with business which he *must do*—assureth me that he often feels it hang heavy on his hands—wishes he had fewer holidays—and goes off—*Westward Ho!*—chanting a tune, to Pall Mall—perfectly convinced that he has convinced me—while I proceed in my opposite direction tuneless.

“It is pleasant again to see this Professor of Indifference doing the honours of his new purchase, when he has fairly housed it. You must view it in every light, till *he* has found the best—placing it at this distance, and at that, but always suiting the focus of your sight to his own. You must spy at it through your fingers, to catch the aerial perspective—though you assure him that to you the landscape shows much more agreeable without that artifice. Wo be to the luckless wight, who does not only not respond to his rapture, but who should drop an unseasonable intimation of preferring one of his anterior bargains to the present!—The last is always his best hit—his ‘*Cynthia of the minute.*’—Alas! how many a mild Madonna have I known to *come in*—a Raphael!—keep its ascendancy for a few brief moons—then, after certain intermedial degradations, from the front drawing-room to the back gallery, thence to the dark parlour,—adopted in turn by each of the Caracci, under successive lowering ascriptions of filiation, mildly breaking its fall—consigned to the oblivious lumber-room, *go out* at last a Lucca Giordano, or plain

Carlo Maratti!—which things when I beheld—musing upon the chances and mutabilities of fate below, hath made me to reflect upon the altered condition of great personages, or that woful Queen of Richard the Second—

“——set forth in pomp,  
She came adorned hither like sweet May.  
Sent back like Hallowmass or shortest day.

“With great love for *you*, J. E. hath but a limited sympathy with what you feel or do. He lives in a world of his own, and makes slender guesses at what passes in your mind. He never pierces the marrow of your habits. He will tell an old established play-goer, that Mr. Such-a-one, of So-and-so (naming one of the theatres), is a very lively comedian—as a piece of news! He advertised me but the other day of some pleasant green lanes which he had found out for me, *knowing me to be a great walker*, in my own immediate vicinity—who have haunted the identical spot any time these twenty years!—He has not much respect for that class of feelings which goes by the name of sentimental. He applies the definition of real evil to bodily sufferings exclusively—and rejecteth all others as imaginary. He is affected by the sight, or the bare supposition, of a creature in pain, to a degree which I have never witnessed out of woman-kind. A constitutional acuteness to this class of sufferings may in part account for this. The animal tribe in particular he taketh under his especial protection. A broken-winded or spur-galled horse is sure to find an advocate in him. An over-loaded ass is his client for ever. He is the apostle to the brute kind—the never-failing friend of those who have none to care for them. The contemplation of a lobster boiled, or eels skinned *alive*, will wring him so, that ‘all for pity he could die.’ It will take the savour from his palate, and the rest from his pillow, for days and nights. With the intense feeling of Thomas Clarkson, he wanted only the steadiness of pursuit, and unity of purpose, of that ‘true yoke-fellow with Time,’ to have effected as much for the *Animal*, as *he* hath done for the *Negro Creation*. But my uncontrollable cousin is but imperfectly formed for purposes which demand co-operation. He cannot wait. His amelioration-plans must be ripened in a day. For this reason he has cut but an equivocal figure in benevolent societies, and combinations for the alleviation of human sufferings. His zeal constantly makes

him to outrun, and put out, his coadjutors. He thinks of relieving,—while they think of debating. He was black-balled out of a society for the Relief of \* \* \* \* \*, because the fervour of his humanity toiled beyond the formal apprehension, and creeping processes, of his associates. I shall always consider this distinction as a patent of nobility in the Elia family!

“Do I mention these seeming inconsistencies to smile at, or upbraid, my unique cousin? Marry, heaven, and all good manners, and the understanding that should be between kinsfolk, forbid!—With all the strangenesses of this *strangest of the Elias*—I would not have him in one jot or tittle other than he is; neither would I barter or exchange my wild kinsman for the most exact, regular, and every way consistent kinsman breathing.”

To add anything essential to this masterly full length is impossible; but a few passages from other sources may be brought together to stand beside it. Talfourd speaks of “the broad, burly, jovial bulk of John Lamb, the Ajax Telamon of the slender clerks of the old South-Sea House, whom he sometimes introduces to the rooms of his younger brother, surprised to learn from them that he is growing famous.” Elsewhere again Talfourd calls him “John Lamb the jovial and burly, who dared to argue with Hazlitt on questions of Art,” a reminder that their argument on the colours of Holbein and Vandyke once reached such a height of feeling that John Lamb knocked Hazlitt down. Crabb Robinson tells us that Coleridge when he heard of the assault expressed “no displeasure.” The quarrel had no serious results; we have it on the authority of Tom Moore, who had it from James Kenney, that when Hazlitt rose he remarked philosophically that he would forgive the injury: “I am a metaphysician and do not mind a blow; nothing but an *idea* hurts me.”

Crabb Robinson’s other references to John Lamb are uniformly hostile. Thus, after calling on Charles one evening, he records emphatically, “I found Lamb’s brother there, and played whist with him and Martin Burney and Miss L. John L. is so grossly rude and vulgar so that I am resolved never to play with him again.” And again: “Dec. 27th, Wednesday, 1820:—Took tea at Lamb’s. One of his monthly parties; less agreeable than



usual. His vulgar brother there, whose manners are intolerable." We may, however, safely assume that John Lamb was quick enough to detect hostility in the Diarist, and that accordingly in his company he emphasised some of its habitual freedoms of behaviour; just as Charles Lamb, when Coleridge would have shown him off to the Mathews' at Highgate, sank perversely beneath his true level. And probably no sweetness or refinement on John Lamb's part would have wrung commendation of him from Crabb Robinson. These things are temperamental. Robinson remained inimical to the end; writing of the news of John Lamb's death, in 1821, he says he shall regret it "only if it embarrasses Charles Lamb."

Of John Lamb's pictures one only is now known—the portrait of Milton which he bought in 1815. This was left, with his other property, to his brother Charles. Charles sold all but the Milton, which he gave as a dowry to Emma Isola, his adopted daughter, on her marriage with Edward Moxon. The original is now in America, in the New York Public Library, but a reproduction will be found in Vol. VI. of my edition of Lamb.

In the character sketch of James Elia nothing is said of his literary efforts; but his brother's letters tell us of two of his compositions. Writing to Robert Lloyd, in 1809, Lamb mentions that the little poem "The Beggar-man," in the *Poetry for Children*, was by John.

#### THE BEGGAR-MAN

Abject, stooping, old, and wan,  
 See yon wretched beggar man;  
 Once a father's hopeful heir,  
 Once a mother's tender care.  
 When too young to understand  
 He but scorch'd his little hand,  
 By the candle's flaming light  
 Attracted, dancing, spiral, bright,  
 Clasp'ng fond her darling round,  
 A thousand kisses heal'd the wound.  
 Now abject, stooping, old, and wan,  
 No mother tends the beggar man.

Then nought too good for him to wear,  
 With cherub face and flaxen hair,  
 In fancy's choicest gauds array'd,  
 Cap of lace with rose to aid,  
 Milk-white hat and feather blue,

Shoes of red, and coral too  
 With silver bells to please his ear,  
 And charm the frequent ready tear.  
 Now abject, stooping, old, and wan,  
 Neglected is the beggar man.

See the boy advance in age,  
 And learning spreads her useful page;  
 In vain! for giddy pleasure calls,  
 And shews the marbles, tops, and balls.  
 What's learning to the charms of play?  
 The indulgent tutor must give way.  
 A heedless wilful dunce, and wild,  
 The parents' fondness spoil'd the child;  
 The youth in vagrant courses ran;  
 Now abject, stooping, old, and wan,  
 Their fondling is the beggar man.

No man writes only one poem, and John Lamb certainly wrote others; but the remainder of his verses are lost. We are, however, richer in his prose. In 1810 Lamb wrote to Crabb Robinson (whose animus against John Lamb had not then ripened) asking him to get reviewed a pamphlet on cruelty to animals, by John Lamb. "My brother, whom you have met at my rooms (a plump, good-looking man of seven-and-forty) has written a book about humanity, which I transmit to you herewith. . . . Don't show it to Mrs. Collier, for I remember she makes excellent *eel* soup, and the leading points of the book are directed against that very process." The only copy of the pamphlet that is now known is in America, in the possession of a collector whose interest in literature takes the form of refusing to allow a transcript to be made. It was entitled, *A Letter to the Right Hon. William Windham, on his opposition to Lord Erskine's Bill for the prevention of cruelty to Animals*, 1810, following, in a precisely similar form, the pamphlet containing Mr. Windham's speech which had been issued in the same year by another publisher. The Bill before the House had been framed by Lord Erskine, then Lord Chancellor, and was first read on May 15th, 1809; it passed the Lords, but was thrown out by the Commons by 37 to 27. Mr. Windham, ex-Secretary for War, in a speech that was both temperate and entirely in agreement with the motive of the Bill, opposed it as treating of a subject unfit for legislation; his contention being that the law-makers had more pressing matter to deal with, and that such

abuses righted themselves. John Lamb, however, fell upon him with vigour.

The passage concerning eels, referred to in the letter to Crabb Robinson, I am fortunately able to quote, since it was copied in the *American Bookman* by the discoverer of the pamphlet, Mr. Luther S. Livingston, who found the little treatise bound up in a volume from Lamb's library containing, also, according to Lamb's own list of contents, Godwin's "Antonio," Coleridge's "Remorse," Barron Field's farce, "The Antiquary," Mr. Windham's speech on "Cruelty to Animals," and a reply to that speech "by J. L." This is the passage—one tremendous sentence—on eels: "If an eel had the wisdom of Solomon, he could not help himself in the ill-usage that befalls him; but if he had, and were told, that it was necessary for our subsistence that he should be eaten, that he must be skinned first, and then broiled; if ignorant of man's usual practice, he would conclude that the cook would so far use her reason as to cut off his head first, which is not fit for food, as then he might be skinned and broiled without harm; for however the other parts of his body might be convulsed during the culinary operations, there could be no feeling of consciousness therein, the communication with the brain being cut off; but if the woman were immediately to stick a fork into his eye, skin him alive, coil him up in a skewer, head and all, so that in the extremest agony he could not move, and forthwith broil him to death: then were the same Almighty Power that formed man from the dust, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, to call the eel into a new existence, with a knowledge of the treatment he had undergone, and he found that the instinctive disposition which man has in common with other carnivorous animals, which inclines him to cruelty, was not the sole cause of his torments; but that men did not attend to consider whether the sufferings of such insignificant creatures could be lessened: that eels were not the only sufferers; that lobsters and other shell fish were put into cold water and boiled to death by slow degrees in many parts of the sea coast: that these, and many other such wanton atrocities, were the consequence of carelessness occasioned by the pride of mankind despising their low estate, and of the general opinion that there is no punishable sin in the ill-treatment of animals designed for our use; that, therefore, the woman did not bestow so much



thought on him as to cut his head off first, and that she would have laughed at any considerate person who should have desired such a thing; with what fearful indignation might he inveigh against the unfeeling metaphysician that, like a cruel spirit alarmed at the appearance of a dawning of mercy upon animals, could not rest satisfied with opposing the Cruelty Prevention Bill by the plea of possible inconvenience to mankind, highly magnified and emblazoned, but had set forth to the vulgar and unthinking of all ranks, in the jargon of proud learning, that man's obligations of morality towards the creatures subjected to his use are imperfect obligations!"

A Commonplace Book<sup>1</sup> belonging to Lamb has led to the discovery of some further polemics by the fiery James Elia. Pasted into that volume is a letter upon the Corn Laws of 1815, signed J. L., cut from the *Examiner* of November 22nd, 1818. J. L. was undoubtedly John Lamb, and, after his brother's character sketch and his remarks on fried eels, to find him defending the poor against the Government, is no surprise. Like Charles Lamb, John Lamb was always on the side of the oppressed, but the two brothers used different weapons: Charles bringing sweet reasonableness and humorous irony to his task, John brandishing a club.

The first communication (for on searching in the *Examiner* for the extracts in the album, I came upon others from the same vigorous pen), printed in November 9th, 1818, begins thus: "Sir, I am happy in having been brought up an humble but sincere follower of the Nazarene:<sup>2</sup> I love to consider Christ as my Redeemer, and would not give up my belief in him for the choicest gifts of fortune. When a child, I have had my feelings so affected by his sufferings, that I never can give up his dying for me upon the dreadful cross."

The writer then plunges into his attack upon the Law, by which the importation of foreign corn (when the price was below 80s. a quarter) was forbidden. Here is a passage: "To remedy all this, we have, first, that delicious preparation, be it food or beverage, which, in the hour of insolence, our people used to laugh at the French for lapping up so savourily, called soup

<sup>1</sup> Described in Appendix II. of the two-volume edition of this work.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to recollect that Charles Lamb's poem, "The Grandame," printed in 1796, 1797 and 1818 (see page 35), ends with the line:—

"And was a follower of the Nazarene."

maigre. Then next, Paternoster-row teems with religious trash, or tracts, as the earth just now with mushrooms; but the people have not yet got into good Master Lintot's way of eating suppositories for radishes. In this we perceive a strong smack of the old Pharisee. The distributing of Bibles just now seems so ill-timed; for, in the forcible words of Hooker, 'destitution, until it is removed, suffereth not the mind of man to admit of any other care.'

"But after all, as a master stroke of policy, commend me to their taking up every interval of the Sabbath, ordained to be a day of rest even for our cattle, however little we regard them, in *schooling* the early care-worn, unkempt little wretches of children: Do they think knowledge and a full sense of their misery will make them happy under it? Is it not a mockery of God for them to be made to say, 'Give us this day our daily bread'? When they can read the gospel for themselves, will they not read with emphasis the woe-denouncing judgments of Jesus Christ, hanging over the heads of the canting hypocrites who are starving them?

"Thank God, we have a New Parliament:—'Sha't see thy other daughter will use thee kindly.' *King Lear*."

The spirit is very fine—a kind of more opulent Cobbett. We see too that, like his brother, John Lamb went to good intellects for his examples—to the Bible, to Shakespeare, to Hooker, and, elsewhere in the letter, to Rabelais.

It was J. L.'s second letter that Charles Lamb pasted into his book: a good choice, as always with him. It has this charming description of gleaning, a privilege which the legislators had threatened: "However, allow me, Mr. Editor, to send a sigh after the nicest word in the language, which must now grow obsolete; the very language of our books is unsuitable to the harshness of the time. The word Glean has ever been a favourite word with poets and authors; it presented instantly to one's mind summer and sunshine and charity, love, virtue, and happiness, the brightest flowers in civilized society; it pictured man satisfied with having secured himself from want, looking on pleased that his less fortunate fellow-creatures, who, like the fowls of the air, gather not into barns, should have a taste of the bounty of Heaven at this holiday time of the year; but the reality is gone.

“The prettiest story we have extant of the early people of the earth arose out of the more ancient privilege of Gleaning. I can scarcely remember now without tears Boaz and Ruth, the filial piety of the lovely girl and all the pastoral innocence and beautiful simplicity of this interesting tale. The charm is gone. Ruth, Lavinia and Brisina, were robbers.” That passage might almost have been written by Charles Lamb himself, although it is in a vein that he did not begin to cultivate until nearly two years later.

On November 29th “A Constant Reader” wrote to the *Examiner* to point out where J. L. was wrong. J. L. lost no time in replying, concluding a long letter with this footnote concerning the friends of the Law: “They were foreseen by Agur the son of Jaketh, and I treat your readers with the fine oriental language of his prophecy:—‘There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw-teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth.—The horse-leach hath two daughters crying, Give, Give!—There are three things that are never satisfied, yea four things say not, It is enough:—The grave and the barren womb, the earth that is not filled with water, and the fire, that saith not, It is enough.’” Throughout the letter J. L. had assumed his opponent to be a mealman and therefore an interested party. In the reply the “Constant Reader” denied that he was a mealman, adding, “I will however compliment him [J. L.] by following his example so far, as to inform *him* what I imagine him to be, viz. from his canting and Scripture-quoting method of writing, I consider him to be a *Methodist Preacher*, accustomed both to whine and denounce with hypocritical solemnity; he is probably too a follower of the Spitalfields Orator.”

There ceased the correspondence, not perhaps very important in itself, but serving as an interesting gloss upon “My Relations.” Of John Lamb’s literary exercises I hope some day to learn more. It is impossible that so ardent a philanthropist should have written only these letters, the “Beggars Man” and the Humanity pamphlet.

John Lamb, after many years of confident bachelorhood married a widow, a Mrs. Isaac Dowden, with one or more children. He died on October 26th, 1821, aged fifty-eight. His will, dated July 14th, 1821, leaves everything to his sole executor, his



brother Charles Lamb of the East India House, from which we may assume that his widow had a separate income of her own. The will was sworn to by John Stoddart, and Philip Fennings of the Custom House.

Charles Lamb felt his brother's death keenly. Writing to Wordsworth in March, 1822, he speaks of a deadness to everything which he thinks may date from his brother's loss. His grief, however, found some expression almost instantly in the essay "Dream Children," perhaps the most beautiful of all his writings, which was printed in the *London Magazine* for January, 1822. It is John Lamb's best title to fame that he should have inspired that exquisite poem in prose.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

1822

Lamb and the Man of the World—Coleridge's Invisible Genius—Coleridge and the Pig—India House Shackles—The *London Magazine* Becomes Irksome—The Lambs in France—An Evening with Talma—Mary Lamb's Illness—Crabb Robinson in Paris—Thomas Hood—Bernard Barton—Lamb's Sonnet on Work—Barton's Sonnet to Elia—Godwin in Difficulties—Lamb and Sir Walter Scott—Godwin's Last Days.

THE year 1822 was also a busy one, producing the "Dissertation on Roast Pig," the papers on the Old Actors, and the "Praise of Chimney Sweepers;" but Lamb's finest work (as it seems to me) was done—1821 was passed. Beautiful and unexcelled things he was yet to write, such as "Blakesmoor in H—shire," "Old China," the Fallacies on Rising with the Lark and Retiring with the Lamb; but he was tiring, the first flush of excitement was over, and he had done in a short space of time a vast deal for so diffident a workman. When it is remembered that these essays were spun entirely from his own memory and fancy in the intervals of office routine, the harvest of the three years 1820 to 1822 becomes the more remarkable.

We find Lamb in February of this year in some "Extracts from the Portfolio of a Man of the World," printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for December, 1846. Who the man of the world was I do not know, but he certainly had the gift of bringing away from good intellects no more than he carried to them. Here is his impression of Lamb:—

"Feb. 18th, 1822:—In company with Charles Lamb. I did not like him—something very poor about his whole conversation—an affected quietness and small humour, just what is natural in a man living in a narrow circle in a city."

Two days later the observer had the ill fortune to waste an evening at Gillman's, listening to Coleridge: "Feb. 20th, 1822:—

G—— took me to see and hear Coleridge. I was sadly disappointed in his appearance—a fat vulgar face, nothing sublime or transcendental about him. I looked for the light of genius which had exercised such influence on his age, but I could not find it.” An account is then given of Coleridge’s monologue on the interview between Hector and Andromache in the sixth book of the *Iliad*, until it was interrupted by the “entrance of some mess which is his supper.”

Lamb’s first letter of 1822—on March 9th—is to Coleridge, who had in error thanked Lamb for a sucking-pig which another had sent. It contains the germ of the essay on roast pig, which Lamb must straightway have written. In the letter he says: “To confess an honest truth, a pig is one of those things which I could never think of sending away. Teal, widgeon, snipes, barn-door fowls, ducks, geese—your tame villatic things—Welsh mutton, collars of brawn, sturgeon, fresh or pickled, your potted char, Swiss cheeses, French pies, early grapes, muscadines, I impart as freely unto my friends as to myself. They are but self extended; but pardon me if I stop somewhere. Where the fine feeling of benevolence giveth a higher smack than the sensual rarity, there my friends (or any good man) may command me; but pigs are pigs, and I myself therein am nearest to myself. Nay, I should think it an affront, an undervaluing done to Nature who bestowed such a boon upon me, if in a churlish mood I parted with the precious gift.”

From the letter to Wordsworth of March 20th I must quote largely: “We are pretty well save colds and rheumatics, and a certain deadness to every thing, which I think I may date from poor John’s Loss, and another accident or two at the same time, that has made me almost bury myself at Dalston, where yet I see more faces than I could wish. Deaths over-set one and put one out long after the recent grief. Two or three have died within this last two twelvem<sup>ths.</sup>, and so many parts of me have been numbed. One sees a picture, reads an anecdote, starts a casual fancy, and thinks to tell of it to this person in preference to every other—the person is gone whom it would have peculiarly suited. It won’t do for *another*. Every departure destroys a class of sympathies. There’s Capt. Burney gone!—what fun has whist now? what matters it what you lead, if you can no longer fancy him looking over you? One never hears any thing,



but the image of the particular person occurs with whom alone almost you would care to share the intelligence. Thus one distributes oneself about—and now for so many parts of me I have lost the market. Common natures do not suffice me. Good people, as they are called, won't serve. I want individuals. I am made up of queer points and I want so many answering needles. The going away of friends does not make the remainder more precious. It takes so much from them as there was a common link. A. B. and C. make a party. A. dies. B. not only loses A. but all A.'s part in C. C. loses A.'s part in B., and so the alphabet sickens by subtraction of interchangeables.

“I express myself muddily, capite dolente. I have a dulling cold. My theory is to enjoy life, but the practice is against it. I grow ominously tired of official confinement. Thirty years have I served the Philistines, and my neck is not subdued to the yoke. You don't know how wearisome it is to breathe the air of four pent walls without relief day after day, all the golden hours of the day between 10 and 4 without ease or interposition. *Tædet me harum quotidianarum formarum*, these pestilential clerk faces always in one's dish. O for a few years between the grave and the desk! they are the same, save that at the latter you are outside the machine. The foul enchanter—letters four do form his name—Busirane is his name in hell—that has curtailed you of some domestic comforts, hath laid a heavier hand on me, not in present infliction, but in taking away the hope of enfranchisement.<sup>1</sup> I dare not whisper to myself a Pension on this side of absolute incapacitation and infirmity, till years have sucked me dry. *Otium cum indignitate*. I had thought in a green old age (O green thought!) to have retired to Ponder's End—emblematic name how beautiful! in the Ware road, there to have made up my accounts with Heaven and the Company, toddling about between it and Cheshunt, anon stretching on some fine Izaak Walton morning to Hoddesdon or Amwell, careless as a Beggar, but walking, walking ever, till I fairly walkd myself off my legs, dying walking!

“The hope is gone. I sit like Philomel all day (but not

<sup>1</sup> The foul enchanter was Joseph Hume, who had attacked Vansittart's scheme for the reduction of pension charges and had made the affairs of the East India Company a subject of special scrutiny. Incidentally he had revised the system of collecting the revenue, thus touching Wordsworth as Distributor of Stamps.

singing) with my breast against this thorn of a Desk, with the only hope that some Pulmonary affliction may relieve me. Vide Lord Palmerston's report of the Clerks in the war office (Debates, this morning's Times) by which it appears in 20 years, as many Clerks have been coughd and catarrhd out of it into their freer graves." Here we see Lamb beginning to think seriously of leaving the East India House. He had now been there just thirty years.

The letter continues: "You have gratifyd me with liking my meeting with Dodd. For the Malvolio story—the thing is become in verity a sad task and I eke it out with any thing. If I could slip out of it I shd. be happy, but our chief reputed assistants have forsaken us. The opium eater crossed us once with a dazzling path, and hath as suddenly left us darkling; and in short I shall go on from dull to worse, because I cannot resist the Bookseller's importunity—the old plea you know of authors, but I believe on my part sincere." Lamb refers to his first paper on the Old Actors in the *London Magazine* for February, 1822. From this point, as he says, his interest in *Elia* declined.

Crabb Robinson has little of the Lambs to record for the early part of 1822. This is the first entry of any importance: "June 17th:—To call on the Lambs and take leave, they setting out for France next morning. I gave Miss Lamb a letter for Miss Williams, to whom I sent a copy of *Mrs. Leicester's School*. The Lambs have a Frenchman as their companion, and Miss Lamb's nurse, in case she should be ill. Lamb was in high spirits; his sister rather nervous. Her courage in going is great."

This brings us to Lamb's great enterprise of seeing Paris, which we know he had cherished as long ago as 1802. The way had been made easy by James Kenney, the dramatist, who was now living at Versailles, where the Lambs were to stay part of the time. The Frenchman who accompanied them was, I think, named Guichy. The party travelled viâ Dieppe, sailing from Brighton.

Writing to Canon Ainger in 1881, about the Lambs, Mrs. Jane Tween, the daughter of Randal Norris, says that one reason of the visit to France was the desire of Charles and Mary Lamb to get an idea of the French language as it was spoken, with a view to helping Emma Isola in that tongue. "Miss Lamb with

her indefatigable perseverance overcame the difficulty and brought to their joint assistance the complete conjugation of the verbs, affirmatively, negatively, interrogatively and negatively-interrogatively." Mrs. Tween wrote at a time removed by nearly sixty years from the visit to France, and her memory may have deceived her. If, however, Charles and Mary Lamb had such an end in view, in addition to the ordinary curiosity of travellers, it would have been very like them.

Lamb has left little record of the impression made upon him by the French people or by Paris. Indeed, he never refers to them in his essays; but in a letter to John Clare soon after his return, he wrote: "Since I saw you I have been in France, and have eaten frogs. The nicest little rabbit things you ever tasted. Do look about for them. Make Mrs. Clare pick off the hind quarters, boil them plain, with parsley and butter. The fore quarters are not so good. She may let them hop off by themselves." Patmore tells us that Lamb, whose conversational French was of the most meagre, wishing once to order an egg, bade the waiter bring "eau-de-vie." The waiter took him at his word, so much to Lamb's satisfaction that he cultivated the error. The late John Hollingshead, the great-nephew of Miss Sarah James, Mary Lamb's nurse in those days, relates on the authority of his aunt that "in Paris Lamb led his own independent life—disappearing sometimes all day, having lived mostly on the river quays on the Odéon side of the Seine, rummaging the bookstalls and print-shops for old book and old prints, returning late at night to the hotel, and skating up the waxed stairs to bed, thoroughly satisfied with his day's work."

At the Hotel de l'Europe (still standing, in the Rue de Valois, just to the east of the Palais Royal) Lamb supped with Talma, the tragedian, and saw the famous "Bellows" portrait of Shakespeare, now known to be an imposture, but so cleverly managed as to deceive Shakespeare's best critic. Talma, who was then acting in *Regulus*, wished for Lamb's opinion of the performance; but Lamb (says Kenney, in a little account printed in Henry Angelo's *Pic Nic*) replied nothing but merely smiled. "'Ah!' said Talma, 'I was not very happy to-night; you must see me in *Sylla*.'—'Incidit in Scyllam,' said Lamb, 'qui vult vitare Charybdim.'—'Ah! you are a rogue; you are a great rogue,' said Talma, shaking him cordially by the hand, as they parted."



In a letter to Barron Field in September Lamb refers to Paris again: "Paris is a glorious picturesque old City. London looks mean and New to it, as the town of Washington would, seen after *it*. But they have no St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey. The Seine, so much despised by Cockneys, is exactly the size to run thro' a magnificent street; palaces a mile long on one side, lofty Edinbro' stone (O the glorious antiques!): houses on the other. The Thames disunites London & Southwark."

Lamb and his sister were to have come home together, but Mary was taken ill—in a diligence, according to Moore—and had to remain behind under the care of Miss James, while her brother returned to his office. A letter from Mary Shelley, the poet's widow, to Leigh Hunt in Italy, a year or so later, contains an interesting glimpse of the household at Versailles and tells a little more about the visit: "I was pleased to see the Kenneys, especially Kenney, since he is much, dear Hunt, in your circle, and I asked him, accordingly, a number of questions. They have an immense family, and a little house quite full—and in the midst of a horde of uninteresting beings, one graceful and amiable creature, Louisa Holcroft, the eldest of Holcroft's girls by Mrs. Kenney: she is now, I suppose, about two and twenty; she attends to the whole family, and her gentleness and sweetness seems the spirit to set all right. I like to see her and Kenney together, they appear so affectionately attached. You would like to see them, too; very pretty, with bright eyes and animated but unaffected and simple manners, her blushes cover her cheeks whenever she speaks, or whenever mamma is going to tell an unlucky story, which she has vainly endeavoured to interrupt with, 'Oh, mamma, not *that*.' . . . Two years ago the Lambs made an excursion to France. When at Amiens, poor Miss L. was taken ill in her usual way, and Lamb was in despair. He met, however, with some acquaintances, who got Miss L. into proper hands, and L. came on to Versailles, and stayed with the Kenney's, going on very well, if the French wine had not been too good for him. . . . Kenney was loud in her [Mary Lamb's] praise, saying that he thought her a faultless creature—possessing every virtue under heaven."

Fortunately Mary Lamb's attack was brief, and Crabb Robinson appearing on the scene, she was enabled to enjoy Paris thoroughly. He writes: "August 18th, 1822:—Miss Lamb has

begged me to give her a day or two. She comes to Paris this evening, and stays here a week. Her only male friend is a Mr. Payne, the author of 'Brutus,' whom she praises exceedingly for his kindness and attentions to Charles. He has a good face." Mr. Payne was John Howard Payne, an American actor and dramatist, known to fame as the author of "Home, Sweet Home," with whom Lamb had a brief correspondence in the months following the French visit. John Poole, the dramatist (whose farce, "Paul Pry," it seems more than probable, grew from Lamb's essay "Tom Pry"), seems also to have met Lamb in Paris.

Crabb Robinson continues: "August 19th:—I then called on Mrs. Kenney and Miss Lamb, who were just arrived at the Hotel de l'Europe, Rue Valois, and I accompanied them through the Palais Royal to the new Restaurations near Tortoni's, and took ice with them. Miss L. was very comfortable indeed.

"August 20th:—I went to Mrs. Kenney and Miss L. with whom I spent the rest of the day. The first accompanied me to Mrs. Aders and we then walked to the Louvre . . . Miss L. enjoyed the galleries. . . .

"August 21st:—Miss L. was as much amused by these singularities [Rag fair and the Rotunda] as by the splendid objects so generally run after. . . . When Charles went back to England he left a note for his sister's direction. After pointing out a few pictures in the Louvre, he proceeds: 'Then you must walk all along the Borough side of the Seine facing the Tuileries. There is a mile and a half of print shops and book stalls. If the latter were but English. Then there is a place where the Paris people put all their dead people, and bring 'em flowers and dolls and gingerbread nuts and sonnets and such trifles. And that is all I think worth seeing as sights, except that the streets and shops of Paris are themselves the best sight.' I had not seen this letter when I took a walk that precisely corresponds with Lamb's taste, all of whose likings I can always sympathise with, but not generally with his dislikings." Writing to Mrs. Kenney at the end of this year Mary Lamb says, "Oh the dear long dreary boulevards!"

On September 11th Lamb writes to Mrs. Kenney to say that Mary has reached home safely, but failed to smuggle in Crabb Robinson's waistcoat. "They could not comprehend how a

waistcoat, marked Henry Robinson, could be a part of Miss Lamb's wearing apparel." Lamb adds a charming little note to Mrs. Kenney's daughter Sophy, whom he calls his dear wife: "the few short days of connubial felicity which I passed with you among the pears and apricots of Versailles were some of the happiest of my life."

We now come to two new friends of greater magnitude, both of whom Lamb met through the *London Magazine*—Thomas Hood and Bernard Barton. Hood, who was then twenty-three, having just given up engraving for literature, had been called in to assist Taylor in editing the magazine when, in the summer of 1821, it passed out of the hands of Baldwin and his partners. Many years after, in the "Literary Reminiscences" in *Hood's Own*, 1839, from which I have already quoted, he described very gracefully and sympathetically his intercourse with Lamb, whom he admired almost to adoration. Lamb had as kindly a feeling for Hood as for any of the younger writers, while his talent amazed him. "That half Hogarth," he once called him.

Here is Hood's account of his first sight of Elia: "I was sitting one morning beside our Editor, busily correcting proofs, when a visitor was announced, whose name, grumbled by a low ventriloquial voice, like Tom Pipes calling from the hold through the hatchway, did not resound distinctly on my tympanum. However, the door opened, and in came a stranger,—a figure remarkable at a glance, with a fine head, on a small spare body, supported by two almost immaterial legs. He was clothed in sables, of a by-gone fashion, but there was something wanting, or something present about him, that certified he was neither a divine, nor a physician, nor a schoolmaster: from a certain neatness and sobriety in his dress, coupled with his sedate bearing, he might have been taken, but that such a costume would be anomalous, for a *Quaker* in black. He looked still more like (what he really was) a literary Modern Antique, a New-Old Author, a living Anachronism, contemporary at once with Burton the Elder, and Colman the Younger. Meanwhile he advanced with rather peculiar gait, his walk was plantigrade, and with a cheerful 'How d'ye,' and one of the blandest, sweetest smiles that ever brightened a manly countenance, held out two fingers to the Editor.

"The two gentlemen in black soon fell into discourse; and



whilst they conferred, the Lavater principle within me, set to work upon the interesting specimen thus presented to its speculations. It was a striking intellectual face, full of wiry lines, physiognomical quips and cranks, that gave it great character. There was much earnestness about the brows, and a deal of speculation in the eyes, which were brown and bright, and 'quick in turning;' the nose, a decided one, though of no established order; and there was a handsome smartness about the mouth. Altogether it was no common face—none of those *willow-pattern* ones, which Nature turns out by thousands at her potteries;—but more like a chance specimen of the Chinese ware, one to the set—unique, antique, quaint. No one who had once seen it, could pretend not to know it again. It was no face to lend its countenance to any confusion of persons in a Comedy of Errors. You might have sworn to it piecemeal,—a separate affidavit for every feature. In short his face was as original as his figure; his figure as his character; his character as his writings; his writings the most original of the age. After the literary business had been settled, the Editor invited his contributor to dinner, adding 'we shall have a hare——' 'And—and—and—and many Friends!'"

Lamb, Hood adds, "was shy like myself with strangers, so that, despite my yearnings, our first meeting scarcely amounted to an introduction. We were both at dinner, amongst the hare's many friends, but our acquaintance got no farther, in spite of a desperate attempt on my part to attract his notice. His complaint of the Decay of Beggars presented another chance: I wrote on coarse paper, and in ragged English, a letter of thanks to him as if from one of his mendicant clients, but it produced no effect. I had given up all hope, when one night, sitting sick and sad, in my bed-room, racked with the rheumatism, the door was suddenly opened, the well-known quaint figure in black walked in without any formality, and with a cheerful 'Well, boy, how are you?' and the bland sweet smile extended the two fingers. They were eagerly clutched of course, and from that hour we were firm friends."

The first of Lamb's letters to Bernard Barton, all of which, with two exceptions, are now preserved in the British Museum, is dated September 11th, 1822. Barton and Lamb had met probably at a *London Magazine* dinner, where Lamb had made a joke

about the inconsistency of Quakers writing poetry; Barton had taken it seriously and had since written to protest. Hence Lamb's first letter, in reply, and the beginning of a very valuable correspondence. In the course of the letter Lamb says: "I am very tired of clerking it, but have no remedy. Did you see a sonnet to this purpose in the *Examiner*?—

"Who first invented Work—and tied the free  
And holy-day rejoicing spirit down  
To the ever-haunting importunity  
Of business, in the green fields, and the town—  
To plough—loom—anvil—spade—&, oh, most sad,  
To this dry drudgery of the desk's dead wood?  
Who but the Being Unblest, alien from good,  
Sabbathless Satan! he who his unglad  
Task ever plies 'mid rotatory burnings,  
That round and round incalculably reel—  
For wrath Divine hath made him like a wheel—  
In that red realm from whence are no returnings;  
Where toiling and turmoiling ever and aye  
He, and his Thoughts, keep pensive worky-day."

The sonnet was, of course, Lamb's own. Writing again in October he continues the subject: "I sincerely sympathise with you on your doleful confinement. Of Time, Health, and Riches, the first in order is not last in excellence. Riches are chiefly good, because they give us Time. What a weight of wearisome prison hours have [I] to look back and forward to, as quite cut out [of] life—and the sting of the thing is, that for six hours every day I have no business which I could not contract into two, if they would let me work Task-work." And again, in December, "I like a hit at our way of life, tho' it does well for me, better than anything short of *all one's time to one's self*, for which alone I rankle with envy at the rich. Books are good, and Pictures are good, and Money to buy them therefore good, but to buy *TIME!* in other words, *LIFE!*" But in January, 1823, when Barton seemed likely to allow his weariness of desk-work to cause him to revolt, Lamb, as we shall see, praised the routine and kept him to it.

Bernard Barton was a Quaker, a clerk in a Quaker bank at Woodbridge, in Suffolk. He was thirty-eight years of age (by nine years Lamb's junior, although one perhaps thinks of him as being his senior); was a steady contributor of devotional verse to the *London Magazine* and the *Annuals*; and was already

the author of four volumes—the latest, *Napoleon, and Other Poems*, just published. Lamb was not destined to write to Barton as he had written to Manning in the old days: he was always a little cautious, since misapprehensions were possible; but the Barton correspondence is full of fine things and quiet humour. The Quaker poet's sonnet "To Elia," printed in the *London Magazine* for February, 1823, is an excellent specimen of his lighter non-devotional verse, and is good criticism too:—

Delightful Author!—unto whom I owe  
 Moments and moods of fancy and of feeling  
 Afresh to grateful Memory now appealing,  
 Fain would I "bless thee—ere I let thee go!"  
 From month to month has the exhaustless flow  
 Of thy original mind, its wealth revealing,  
 With quaintest humour, and deep pathos healing  
 The world's rude wounds, revived Life's early glow:  
 And, mixt with this, at times, to earnest thought  
 Glimpses of truth, most simple and sublime,  
 By thy imagination have been brought  
 Over my spirit. From the olden time  
 Of Authorship thy Patent should be dated,  
 And thou with Marvell, Browne, and Burton, mated.

In October we find Lamb writing to Haydon to ask for help for Godwin—not monetary help, for poor Haydon was never in a position to supply that, but the interest of Haydon's friends or patrons, particularly Mrs. Coutts (Harriet Mellon, the actress, who had played in "Mr. H.") and Sir Walter Scott. Godwin was in very low water, as foreshadowed by an entry in Crabb Robinson's *Diary* in the previous June: "Godwin also called. He related to me his late law suits, which ended in his being turned out of his house. He has lived some years without paying any rent, availing himself of points of law which rendered it difficult for any person to make a title. The complacency with which he was content to profit by this has lessened him in my opinion. However he suffers now by being obliged to go into a new house. He has a large arrear of rent to discharge and the costs of action to pay, and he has been in great distress. Lamb has lent him £50. I could not refuse him £30. I doubt whether I shall ever be repaid."

Lamb took Godwin's case very seriously, and was tireless in his efforts to rehabilitate him. His letter to Scott, sealed with a seal borrowed from Barron Field, produced a donation, which





BERNARD BARTON

FROM A DRAWING BY SAMUEL LAURENCE



was to be anonymous, of £10. Lamb in his reply said : " I cannot pass over your kind expressions as to myself. It is not likely that I shall ever find myself in Scotland, but should the event ever happen, I should be proud to pay my respects to you in your own land. My disparagement of heaths and highlands—if I said any such thing in half earnest,—you must put down as a piece of the old Vulpine policy. I must make the most of the spot I am chained to, and console myself for my flat destiny as well as I am able. I know very well our mole-hills are not mountains, but I must cocker them up and make them look as big and as handsome as I can, that we may both be satisfied. Allow me to express the pleasure I feel on an occasion given me of writing to you." In this letter Lamb seems to be replying to one in which Scott invited him to Scotland; Mr. Andrew Lang has recently discovered that Scott had sent him an invitation as early as 1818.

Lamb and Scott met once at breakfast at Haydon's in 1821; Procter describes the meeting in his *Autobiographical Fragment*. Lamb did not care for the Waverley novels (which he persuaded Dyer were written by Lord Castlereagh) although he pronounced *Kenilworth* a good "story;" but he admired their author, and Talfourd has an agreeable story of his pleasure when a stranger in the street pointed out to him the Great Magician.

To return to Godwin, a fund was raised for his benefit in the following year, chiefly by Lamb's efforts, the signatories to the appeal, for £600, being Crabb Robinson, £30; William Ayrton, £10; John Murray, £10 10s.; Charles Lamb, £50 (the conversion of the loan into a gift); the Hon. W. Lamb, afterwards Lord Melbourne, £20; Lord Francis Leveson Gower, £10; Lord Dudley, £50; Sir James Mackintosh, £10. Byron gave £26 5s., Alsager £10, and "A. B. C. [*i.e.*, Sir Walter Scott], by Charles Lamb," £10. The Godwins moved to the Strand, where the philosopher worked on his *History of the Commonwealth*. In 1833 he received the post of Yeoman Usher of the Exchequer, which he held till his death in 1836, although its duties had vanished.



## CHAPTER XL

1823

Contemporary Opinion of Lamb—A Letter of Thanks for a Pig—Byron's "Vision of Judgment"—Good Sense to Barton—Sara Coleridge at Highgate—Lamb and the Pudding—Monkhouse's Famous Dinners—Lamb and Tom Moore—Mary Lamb's Handwriting—Enter John Bates Dibdin—The Lambs at Hastings—A Church for the Pocket—Lamb and the Bathing Men—The "Letter to Southey"—Christopher North's Chaff—Southey's Fine Reply—The Reconciliation—The Move to Colebrooke Cottage—A Last Glimpse of the Covent Garden Rooms—George Daniel's Recollections of Lamb—Robert Bloomfield—Lamb Makes His Will—George Dyer's Immersion—Lamb at the Mansion House.

THE year 1823 was important for at least three reasons: *Elia*, Lamb's best-known book, was published; Lamb left London for Islington; and he wrote the "Letter to Southey." The chief essays of 1823, which were afterwards collected in the *Last Essays of Elia* in 1833, were "Old China," "Poor Relations," "The Old Margate Hoy" and "Amicus Redivivus."

From Sir Richard Phillips' *Public Characters of all Nations*, which was published in this year, we may learn how Lamb was at that time considered:—

"Mr. Charles Lamb is a native of London, and was educated at Christ's Hospital. He has for some years held a situation in the Accomptant-general's office at the India-house. Mr. Lamb early in life was exceedingly intimate with Southey, Coleridge, and Lloyd. He is now connected with the London Magazine, to which he has contributed various articles of great originality. Though he cannot, perhaps, be classed among men of eminent genius, he is undoubtedly very far above mediocrity, whether we consider him as a poet, an essayist, or a critic. . . . [His works are then enumerated.] The sister of Mr. Lamb, an amiable and intelligent woman, has published some works for youth."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Another public reference to Lamb may also be mentioned here, by way of indicating how certain of his contemporaries looked at the man who set out to write for antiquity. The critic in question does not of course really count, but his point of view is not perhaps uninteresting. In *The Press; or, Literary Chit Chat, A Satire*, published in 1822, by, I believe, one James Harley, most of the writers of the day are brought under review by the three persons of the

One of the first letters of 1823 is to Wordsworth, accompanying a gift of *Elia*. Lamb writes: "There is nothing in my pages, which a Lady may not read aloud without indecorum, *which is more than can be said of Shakspeare*. What a nut this last sentence would be for Blackwood!"—referring to *Blackwood's* attacks on the Cockney School of Literature. Another early and delightful letter is to Mr. and Mrs. Collier who, like several of the readers of the "Dissertation on Roast Pig," had sent its author an offering from the sty.

"Twelfth Day [January 6], 1823.

"The pig was above my feeble praise. It was a dear pigmy. There was some contention as to who should have the ears, but in spite of his obstinacy (deaf as these little creatures are to advice) I contrived to get at one of them.

"It came in boots too, which I took as a favor. Generally those petty toes, pretty toes! are missing. But I suppose he wore them, to look taller.

"He must have been the least of his race. His little foots would have gone into the silver slipper. I take him to have been Chinese, and a female.—

"If Evelyn could have seen him, he would never have farrowed two such prodigious volumes, seeing how much good can be contained in—how small a compass!

"He crackled delicately.

"John Collier Jun<sup>r</sup>. has sent me a Poem which (without the smallest bias from the aforesaid present, believe me) I pronounce *sterling*.<sup>1</sup>

"I set about Evelyn, and finished the first volume in the dialogue. Lamb comes in after a reference to the "Lakish poets," who "seem to woo the quiz." Lloyd is then referred to, and then:—

Pocus

Also Lambe

Whom Covent Garden once contrived to damn.

Hocus

His Farce you mean: 'tis better than the mass

Of fitting dramas that before us pass.

His tales are so affected in their style

That oft, in lieu of tears, they cause a smile.

Later there is a prose note to this passage:—

"Lambe is also a pleasing writer, but egregiously affected. His 'Mr. H.' possesses excellencies as a farce, that induce me to wish its author would devote himself to such a species of writing, instead of mawkish tales, or such vapid and thoroughly ridiculous articles as most of those 'Elia' writes in the London Magazine."

<sup>1</sup>"A Poet's Pilgrimage."

course of a natural day. Today I attack the second.—Parts are very interesting.—

“I left a blank at top of my letter, not being determined *which* to address it to, so Farmer and Farmer’s wife will please to divide our thanks. May your granaries be full, and your rats empty, and your chickens plump, and your envious neighbors lean, and your labourers busy, and you as idle and as happy as the day is long!

“VIVE L’ AGRICULTURE!

“Frank Field’s marriage of course you have seen in the papers, and that his brother Barron is expected home.

“How do you make your pigs so little?

They are vastly engaging at that age.

I was so myself.

Now I am a disagreeable old hog—

A middle-aged-gentleman-and-a-half.

My faculties thank God are not much impaired. I have my sight, hearing, taste, pretty perfect; and can read the Lord’s Prayer in the common type, by the help of a candle, without making many mistakes.

“Believe me, while my faculties last, a proper appreciator of your many kindnesses in this way; and that the last lingering relish of past flavors upon my dying memory will be the smack of that little Ear. It was the left ear, which is lucky. Many happy returns (not of the Pig) but of the New Year to both.—

“Mary for her share of the Pig and the memoirs desires to send the same—

“Dr. Mr. C. and Mrs. C.—

“Yours truly

“C. LAMB.”

On January 8th Crabb Robinson has this entry: “Went in the evening to Lamb. I have seldom spent a more agreeable few hours with him. He was serious and kind—his wit was subordinate to his judgment, as is usual in tête-à-tête parties. He spoke respectfully of an allegoric poem John [Payne] Collier has written [“The Poet’s Pilgrimage,” 1822]; says the style is remarkably good, adding ‘It is like a collection of the duller parts of Spenser and not quite so good.’ Speaking of Coleridge, he said, ‘He ought not to have a wife or children; he should have a sort of diocesan care of the world—no parish



duty.' He reprobated the prosecution of the 'Vision of Judgment' by Lord Byron; Southey's 'V. of J.' is more worthy of punishment, for his is an arrogance beyond endurance. Lord Byron's satire is one of the most good-natured description—no malevolence!!!"<sup>1</sup>

The next letter contains the famous dissuasion. Barton had nourished thoughts of throwing up the bank and taking to literature. Says Lamb: "'Throw yourself on the world without any rational plan of support, beyond what the chance employ of Booksellers would afford you'!!! Throw yourself rather, my dear Sir, from the steep Tarpeian rock, slap-dash headlong upon iron spikes. If you had but five consolatory minutes between the desk and the bed, make much of them, and live a century in them, rather than turn slave to the Booksellers. They are Turks and Tartars, when they have poor Authors at their beck. Hitherto you have been at arm's length from them. Come not within their grasp. I have known many authors for bread, some repining, others envying the blessed security of a Counting House, all agreeing they had rather have been Taylors, Weavers, what not? rather than the things they were. I have known some starved, some to go mad, one dear friend literally dying in a workhouse.<sup>2</sup> You know not what a rapacious, dishonest set those booksellers are. Ask even Southey, who (a single case almost) has made a fortune by book drudgery, what he has found them.<sup>3</sup> O you know not, may you never know! the miseries of subsisting by authorship. 'Tis a pretty appendage to a situation like yours or mine, but a slavery worse than all slavery to be a bookseller's dependent, to drudge your brains for pots of ale and breasts of mutton, to change your

<sup>1</sup> Byron's "Vision of Judgment," a travesty of Southey's "Vision of Judgment," his official poem on the death of George III. (in which Byron had been called the leader of the Satanic school), had been printed in the *Liberator*, Leigh Hunt's paper, and led to a prosecution. Writing to Barton in January, 1824, Lamb says: "The Decision against Hunt for the 'Vision of Judgment' made me sick. What is to become of the old talk about OUR GOOD OLD KING—his personal virtues saving us from a revolution &c. &c. Why, none that think it can utter it now. It must stink. And the Vision is really, as to Him-ward, such a tolerant good humour'd thing. What a wretched thing a Lord Chief Justice is, always was, and will be!" Hunt was John Hunt, Leigh Hunt's brother, the publisher of the *Liberator*, who was fined £100 for the libel said to be contained in Byron's satire, and bound over to be of good behaviour.

<sup>2</sup> George Burnett.

<sup>3</sup> An exaggeration. Southey never made more than a competency, and that only by ceaseless toil.

free thoughts and voluntary numbers for ungracious TASK-WORK.

“Those fellows hate *us*. The reason I take to be, that, contrary to other trades, in which the Master gets all the credit (a Jeweller or Silversmith for instance), and the Journeyman, who really does the fine work, is in the background, in *our* work the world gives all the credit to *Us*, whom *they* consider as *their* Journeymen, and therefore do they hate us, and cheat us, and oppress us, and would wring the blood of us out, to put another sixpence in their mechanic pouches. I contend, that a Bookseller has a *relative honesty* towards Authors, not like his honesty to the rest of the world. B[aldwin], who first engag'd me as Elia, has not paid me up yet (nor any of us without repeated mortifying applials), yet how the Knave fawned while I was of service to him! Yet I dare say the fellow is punctual in settling his milk-score, &c. Keep to your Bank, and the Bank will keep you. Trust not to the Public, you may hang, starve, drown yourself, for anything that worthy *Personage* cares.

“I bless every star that Providence, not seeing good to make me independent, has seen it next good to settle me upon the stable foundation of Leadenhall. Sit down, good B. B., in the Banking Office; what, is there not from six to Eleven P.M. 6 days in the week, and is there not all Sunday? Fie, what a superfluity of man's time,—if you could think so! Enough for relaxation, mirth, converse, poetry, good thoughts, quiet thoughts. O the corroding torturing tormenting thoughts, that disturb the Brain of the unlucky wight, who must draw upon it for daily sustenance. Henceforth I retract all my fond complaints of mercantile employment, look upon them as Lovers' quarrels. I was but half in earnest. Welcome, dead timber of a desk, that makes me live.”

It was in the early months of this year that Sara Coleridge came with her mother on a visit to her father at the Gillmans'. She was then twenty-one and had already translated into excellent English Martin Dobrizhoffer's *History of the Abipones*, the payment for which was intended by her to pay her brother Derwent's college fees.

Writing to Barton on February 17th Lamb says: “Yes, I have seen Miss Coleridge, and wish I had just such a—daughter.

God love her—to think that she should have had to toil thro' five octavos of that cursed (I forget I write to a Quaker) Abbey-pony History, and then to abridge them to 3, and all for £113. At her years, to be doing stupid Jesuits' Latin into English, when she should be reading or writing Romances. Heaven send her Uncle do not breed her up a Quarterly Reviewer!" Sara Coleridge's romancing days came later, when she wrote *Phantasmion*. And again, on March 11th, Lamb writes: "The she Coleridges have taken flight, to my regret. With Sara's own-made acquisitions, her unaffectedness and no-pretensions are beautiful. You might pass an age with her without suspecting that she knew any thing but her mother's tongue. I don't mean any reflection on Mrs. Coleridge here. I had better have said her vernacular idiom. Poor C. I wish he had a home to receive his daughter in. But he is but as a stranger or a visitor in this world."

A story is told of Lamb visiting at the Gillmans' while Sara Coleridge was there, and immensely enjoying the interpolations "My uncle [Southey] doesn't think so" which she thought it her duty to make during one of her father's monologues. At last Coleridge had to pause for breath, which gave Lamb the opportunity, mimicking her tones, to break in with the same gentle, but, under the circumstances, extremely provocative, comment.

Possibly it was on this occasion that the pleasant incident occurred that is recorded by C. R. Leslie, the painter, in his *Autobiographical Recollections*: "I dined with Lamb one day at Mr. Gillman's. Returning to town in the stage-coach, which was filled with Mr. Gillman's guests, we stopped for a minute or two at Kentish Town. A woman asked the coachman, 'Are you full inside?' upon which Lamb put his head through the window and said, 'I am quite full inside; that last piece of pudding at Mr. Gillman's did the business for me.'"

On April 4th the literary dinner at Monkhouse's was eaten. Crabb Robinson mentions it in his *Diary*, and again in a letter to the *Athenæum*, thirty years later. In his *Diary* he wrote: "April 4th:—Dined at Monkhouse's. Our party consisted of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Moore, and Rogers. Five poets of very unequal worth and most disproportionate popularity, whom the public probably would arrange in the very inverse order,



except that it would place Moore above Rogers. During this afternoon, Coleridge alone displayed any of his peculiar talent. He talked much and well. I have not for years seen him in such excellent health and spirits. His subjects metaphysical criticism—Wordsworth he chiefly talked to. Rogers occasionally let fall a remark. Moore seemed conscious of his inferiority. He was very attentive to Coleridge, but seemed to relish Lamb, whom he sat next. L. was in a good frame—kept himself within bounds and was only cheerful at last. . . . I was at the bottom of the table, where I very ill performed my part. . . . I walked home late with Lamb.”

In his *Athenæum* account (June 25th, 1853) Robinson wrote: “I can still recall to my mind the look and tone with which Lamb addressed Moore, when he could not articulate very distinctly:—‘Mister Moore, will you drink a glass of wine with me?’—suing the action to the word, and hob-nobbing. Then he went on—‘Mister Moore, till now I have always felt an *antipathy* to you, but now that I have seen you I shall like you ever after.’”<sup>1</sup>

Moore wrote thus in his *Journal*: “Dined at Mr. Monkhouse’s (a gentleman I had never seen before) on Wordsworth’s invitation, who lives there whenever he comes to town. A singular party: Coleridge, Rogers, Wordsworth and wife, Charles Lamb (the hero, at present, of the ‘London Magazine’), and his sister (the poor woman who went mad in a diligence on the way to Paris), and a Mr. Robinson, one of the *minora sidera* of this constellation of the Lakes, the host himself, a Mæcenas of the school, contributing nothing but good dinners and silence. Charles Lamb, a clever fellow certainly; but full of villainous and abortive puns, which he miscarries of every minute. Some excellent things, however, have come from him. . . . Lamb quoted an epitaph, by Clio Rickman, in which, after several lines, in the usual jog-trot style of epitaph, he continued thus:—

‘He well performed the husband’s, father’s part,  
And knew immortal Hudibras by heart.’

<sup>1</sup> In some verses to Barry Cornwall in the *London Magazine* in September, 1820, Lamb had written:—

“Let hate, or grosser heats, their foulness mask  
In riddling *Funius*, or in *L—e*’s name:”

L—e being Thomas Little (*i.e.*, Thomas Moore), the author of some rather free Anacreontics. When Lamb reprinted the poem, in 1830, the second line was altered.

A good deal of talk with Lamb about De Foe's works, which he praised warmly, particularly 'Colonel Jack,' of which he mentioned some striking passages. Is collecting the works of the Dunciad heroes."

This is Lamb's description of the same dinner party, in a letter to Barton on April 5th: "I wishd for you yesterday. I dined in Parnassus, with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Rogers, and Tom Moore—half the Poetry of England constellated and clustered in Gloster Place! It was a delightful Even! Coleridge was in his finest vein of talk, had all the talk, and let 'em talk as evilly as they do of the envy of Poets, I am sure not one there but was content to be nothing but a listener. The Muses were dumb, while Apollo lectured, on his and their fine Art. It is a lie that Poets are envious, I have known the best of them, and can speak to it, that they give each other their merits, and are the kindest critics as well as best authors. I am scribbling a muddy epistle with an aking head, for we did not quaff Hippocrene last night. Marry, it was Hippocras rather."

On April 25th we have this pleasant opening to a letter to Miss Hutchinson, which should be studied also in the facsimile in my edition of Lamb's correspondence: "Mary has such an invincible reluctance to any epistolary exertion, that I am sparing her a mortification by taking the pen from her. The plain truth is, she writes such a pimping, mean, detestable hand, that she is ashamed of the formation of her letters. There is an essential poverty and abjectness in the frame of them. They look like begging letters. And then she is sure to omit a most substantial word in the second draught (for she never ventures an epistle without a foul copy first) which is obliged to be interlined, which spoils the neatest epistle, you know [*the word "epistle" is underlined*]. Her figures, 1, 2, 3, 4, &c., where she has occasion to express numerals, as in the date (25 Apr 1823) are not figures, but Figurantes. And the combined posse go staggering up and down shameless as drunkards in the day time. It is no better when she rules her paper, her lines are 'not less erring' than her words—a sort of unnatural parallel lines, that are perpetually threatening to meet, which you know is quite contrary to Euclid [*here Lamb has ruled lines grossly unparallel*]. Her very blots are not bold like this [*here a bold blot*], but poor smears [*here a poor smear*] half left in and half

scratched out, with another smear left in their place. I like a clean letter. A bold free hand, and a fearless flourish. Then she has always to go thro' them (a second operation) to dot her i s, and cross her t s. I don't think she can make a cork screw, if she tried—which has such a fine effect at the end or middle of an epistle—and fills up—

[*Here Lamb has made a corkscrew two inches long.*]

There is a corkscrew, one of the best I ever drew. By the way, what incomparable whiskey that was of Monkhouse's. But if I am to write a letter, let me begin, and not stand flourishing like a fencer at a fair."

Later is this sentence: "I am afraid our co-visit [possibly to the Lakes] with Coleridge was a dream. . . . I think the Gilmans would scarce trust him with us, I have a malicious knack at cutting of apron strings."

And now we come to a new acquaintance, John Bates Dibdin, son of Charles Dibdin, the younger, and therefore grandson of the author of *Tom Bowling*. Young Dibdin (who was twenty-five years of age) was a clerk in a merchant's office in Old Jewry, and, like Lamb, interested in literary pursuits in his spare time, having some editorial connection with the *European Magazine*. I borrow from Canon Ainger an interesting account of the beginning of Dibdin's friendship with Lamb, written by Dibdin's sister, Mrs. Tonna. Her brother, she says, "had constant occasion to conduct the giving or taking of cheques, as it might be, at the India House. There he always selected the 'little clever man' in preference to the other clerks. At that time the *Elia Essays* were appearing in print. No one had the slightest conception who 'Elia' was. He was talked of everywhere, and everybody was trying to find him out, but without success. At last, from the style and manner of conveying his ideas and opinions on different subjects, my brother began to suspect that Lamb was the individual so widely sought for, and wrote some lines to him, anonymously, sending them by post to his residence, with the hope of sifting him on the subject. Although Lamb could not *know* who sent him the lines, yet he looked very hard at the writer of them the next time they met, when he walked up, as usual, to Lamb's desk in the most unconcerned manner, to transact the necessary business. Shortly after, when they were again in conversation, something dropped from Lamb's lips



which convinced his hearer, beyond a doubt, that his suspicions were correct. He therefore wrote some more lines (anonymously, as before), beginning—

“‘I’ve found thee out, O Elia!’

and sent them to Colebrook Row [Great Russell Street]. The consequence was that at their next meeting Lamb produced the lines, and after much laughing, confessed himself to be *Elia*. This led to a warm friendship between them.” The friendship unhappily was destined to be but short, for Dibdin died of consumption in 1828. He had, however, preserved all of Lamb’s letters to him, some of which are very delightful.

Two passages from Crabb Robinson :—

“May 3, 1823 :—Read the *London Magazine* in bed. Lamb’s ‘Poor Relations.’ It is not quite agreeable—some observations on poverty which it is painful to make.

“May 17, 1823 :—Walked to Dalston. I read to Miss Lamb, who was alone, 2 acts of ‘Iphigenia’ and heard her read. We looked over German together. I was delighted at the opportunity of giving her pleasure.”

In June the Lambs were at Hastings, with Miss James, Mary Lamb’s nurse. A letter from Mary Lamb to Mrs. Randal Norris, written at York Cottage, No. 4, The Priory, tells the news: “We took our places for Sevenoaks, intending to remain there all night in order to see Knole, but when we got there we chang’d our minds, and went on to Tunbridge Wells. About a mile short of the Wells the coach stopped at a little inn, and I saw lodgings to let on a little, very little, house opposite. I ran over the way, and secured them before the coach drove away, and we took immediate possession: it proved a very comfortable place, and we remained there nine days. The first evening, as we were wandering about, we met a lady, the wife of one of the India House clerks, with whom we had been slightly acquainted some years ago, which slight acquaintance has been ripened into a great intimacy during the nine pleasant days that we passed at the Wells. She and her two daughters went with us in an open chaise to Knole, and as the chaise held only five, we mounted Miss James upon a little horse, which she rode famously. I was very much pleased with Knole, and still more with Penshurst, which we also visited. We saw Frant and the Rocks, and made

much use of your Guide Book, only Charles lost his way once going by the map.

“ We were in constant exercise the whole time, and spent our time so pleasantly that when we came here on Monday we missed our new friends and found ourselves very dull. We are by the seaside in a *still less* house, and we have exchanged a very pretty landlady for a very ugly one, but she is equally attractive to us. We eat turbot, and we drink smuggled Hollands, and we walk up hill and down hill all day long. In the little intervals of rest that we allow ourselves I teach Miss James French; she picked up a few words during her foreign Tour with us, and she has had a hankering after it ever since.

“ We came from Tunbridge Wells in a Postchaise, and would have seen Battle Abbey on the way, but it is only shewn on a Monday. We are trying to coax Charles into a Monday’s excursion. And Bexhill we are also thinking about. Yesterday evening we found out by chance the most beautiful view I ever saw. It is called ‘The Lovers’ Seat.’”

Lamb, who was not happy by the sea, was chiefly taken at Hastings not by the Lovers’ Seat but by Hollingdon Rural Church. His letters contain three descriptions of the little fane, best of which is that to Dibdin in 1826, when Dibdin was at Hastings alone: “ Let me hear that you have clamber’d up to Lover’s Seat; it is as fine in that neighbourhood as Juan Fernandez, as lonely too, when the Fishing boats are not out; I have sat for hours, staring upon a shipless sea. The salt sea is never so grand as when it is left to itself. One cock-boat spoils it. A sea mew or two improves it. And go to the little church, which is a very protestant Loretto, and seems dropt by some angel for the use of a hermit, who was at once parishioner and a whole parish. It is not too big. Go in the night, bring it away in your portmanteau, and I will plant it in my garden. It must have been erected in the very infancy of British Christianity, for the two or three first converts; yet hath it all the appert[en]ances of a church of the first magnitude, its pulpit, its pews, its baptismal font; a cathedral in a nutshell. Seven people would crowd it like a Caledonian Chapel. The minister that divides the word there, must give lumping pennyworths. It is built to the text of two or three assembled in my name. It reminds me of the grain of mustard seed. If the glebe land

is proportionate, it may yield two potatoes. Tythes out of it could be no more split than a hair. Its First fruits must be its Last, for 'twould never produce a couple. It is truly the strait and narrow way, and few there be (of London visitants) that find it. The still small voice is surely to be found there, if any where. A sounding board is merely there for ceremony. It is secure from earthquakes, not more from sanctity than size, for 'twould feel a mountain thrown upon it no more than a taper-worm would. Go and see, but not without your spectacles."

De Quincey, who had no gift for accuracy, locates at Hastings a good story of Lamb's stammering, which Lamb himself versified for the late Archdeacon Hessey when he was a boy at the Merchant Taylors' school. My own impression is that it belongs to an early Margate visit; but here it is: "Coleridge told me of a ludicrous embarrassment which it [Lamb's impediment] caused him at Hastings. Lamb had been medically advised to a course of sea-bathing; and accordingly at the door of his bathing machine, whilst he stood shivering with cold, two stout fellows laid hold of him, one at each shoulder, like heraldic supporters: they waited for the word of command from their principal, who began the following oration to them: 'Hear me, men! Take notice of this—I am to be dipped.' What more he would have said is unknown to land or sea or bathing machines; for having reached the word dipped, he commenced such a rolling fire of Di—di—di—di, that when at length he descended *à plomb* upon the full word *dipped*, the two men, rather tired of the long suspense, became satisfied that they had reached what lawyers call the 'operative' clause of the sentence; and both exclaiming at once, 'Oh yes, Sir, we're quite aware of *that*'—down they plunged him into the sea.

"On emerging, Lamb sobbed so much from the cold, that he found no voice suitable to his indignation; from necessity he seemed tranquil; and again addressing the men, who stood respectfully listening, he began thus:—'Men! is it possible to obtain your attention?'—'Oh surely, sir, by all means.'—'Then listen: once more I tell you, I am to be di—di—di—'—and then, with a burst of indignation, 'dipped, I tell you'—'Oh decidedly, sir,' rejoined the men, 'decidedly'—and down the stammerer went for the second time. Petrified with cold and wrath, once more Lamb made a feeble attempt at explanation—



‘Grant me pa—pa—patience ; is it mum—um—murder you me—me—mean ? Again and a—ga—ga—gain, I tell you, I’m to be di—di—di—dipped,’ now speaking furiously, with the voice of an injured man. ‘Oh yes, sir,’ the men replied, ‘we know that—we fully understood it’—and for the third time down went Lamb into the sea. ‘Oh limbs of Satan!’ he said, on coming up for the third time, ‘it’s now too late ; I tell you that I am—no, that I *was*—to be di—di—di—dipped only *once*.’”<sup>1</sup>

After telling Barton of Hollingdon Church on July 10th, 1823, Lamb adds : “Southey has attacked Elia on the score of infidelity, in the *Quarterly*—Article, ‘Progress of Infidels.’ I had not, nor have, seen the *Monthly*. He might have spared an old friend such a construction of a few careless flights, that meant no harm to religion. If all his UNGUARDED expressions on the subject were to be collected—

“But I love and respect Southey—and will not retort. I HATE HIS REVIEW ; and his being a Reviewer.

“The hint he has droppd will knock the sale of the book on the head, which was almost at a stop before.

“Let it stop. There is corn in Egypt, while there is cash at Leadenhall. You and I are something besides being Writers Thank God.”

This brings us to the “Letter to Southey,” which although not published until October was probably written, in spite of Lamb’s statement that he would not retort, soon after, during Mary Lamb’s illness. In a review of a work by Grégoire on Deism in France, in the *Quarterly* for January, which presumably had only just been published, Southey had referred incidentally to *Elia*. The article was called “The Progress of Infidelity” and in it Southey found occasion to say :—

Unbelievers have not always been honest enough thus to express their real feelings ; but this we know concerning them, that when they have renounced their birthright of hope, they have not been able to divest themselves of fear. From the nature of the human mind this might be presumed, and in fact it is so. They may deaden the heart and stupify the conscience, but they cannot destroy the imaginative faculty. There is a remarkable proof of this in Elia’s *Essays*, a book which wants only a sounder religious feeling, to be as delightful as it is original. In that upon ‘Witches and other Night Fears,’ he says : “It is not book, or picture, or the stories of foolish servants, which create these terrors in children. They can at most but give them a direction. Dear little T. H., who

<sup>1</sup> Leigh Hunt also tells the story, in one of his periodicals ; and Mrs. Mathews tells it too.

of all children has been brought up with the most scrupulous exclusion of every taint of superstition, who was never allowed to hear of goblin or apparition, or scarcely to be told of bad men, or to hear or read of any distressing story, finds all this world of fear, from which he has been so rigidly excluded *ab extra*, in his own 'thick-coming fancies;' and from his little midnight pillow this nurse-child of optimism will start at shapes, unborrowed of tradition, in sweats to which the reveries of the cell-damned murderer are tranquillity."

The "Letter to Southey" called forth by this passage does not, I think, show Lamb at his best. That he had provocation must be admitted, for Southey's comment on *Elia* was foolish and unnecessary, while, as Lamb implies, the book and its author had already suffered so much from want of recognition that this last affront was peculiarly irritating. Yet the Letter does not so much assert that Southey's judgment was wrong, as that, on account of youthful flippancies, he was not the man to make it: a line of argument which, coming from so broad-minded a man as Charles Lamb, is not too admirable. Although Southey had taken a narrow view of the book, his view was sincere. Moreover it was the view of the matured and developed Southey of that time, and not of the less respectable and reverend Southey of many years earlier of whom Lamb was at pains to remind him. The Letter, however, contains two passages, at any rate, which could not be spared. This:—

One man shall love his friends and his friends' faces; and, under the uncertainty of conversing with them again, in the same manner and familiar circumstances of sight, speech, &c., as upon earth—in a moment of no irreverent weakness—for a dream-while—no more—would be almost content, for a reward of a life of virtue (if he could ascribe such acceptance to his lame performances), to take up his portion with those he loved, and was made to love, in this good world, which he knows—which was created so lovely, beyond his deservings. Another, embracing a more exalted vision—so that he might receive indefinite additaments of power, knowledge, beauty, glory, &c.—is ready to forego the recognition of humbler individualities of earth, and the old familiar faces. The shapings of our heavens are the modifications of our constitution; and Mr. Feeble Mind, or Mr. Great Heart, is born in every one of us.

And the list of some of the chief friends whom Lamb honoured:—

In more than one place, if I mistake not, you have been pleased to compliment me at the expence of my companions. I cannot accept your compliment at such a price. The upbraiding of a man's poverty naturally makes him look about him, to see whether he be so poor indeed as he is presumed to be. You have put me upon counting my riches. Really, Sir, I did not know I was so wealthy in the article of friendships. There is —, and —, whom you never heard of, but exemplary characters both, and excellent church-goers; and N[orris] mine and my father's friend for nearly half a century; and the enthusiast for Wordsworth's poetry, T. N. T[alfourd], a little tainted with Socinianism, it is

to be feared, but constant in his attachments, and a capital critic; and —, a sturdy old Athanasian, so that sets all to rights again; and W[ainewright], the light, and warm-as-light hearted, Janus of the London; and the translator of Dante, still a curate, modest and amiable C[ary]; and Allan C[unningham], the large-hearted Scot; and P[rocter], candid and affectionate as his own poetry; and A[llsop], Coleridge's friend; and G[illman], his more than friend; and Coleridge himself, the same to me still, as in those old evenings, when we used to sit and speculate (do you remember them, Sir?) at our old Salutation tavern, upon Pantisocracy and golden days to come on earth; and W[ordsworth] (why, Sir, I might drop my rent-roll here; such goodly farms and manors have I reckoned up already. In what possessions has not this last name alone estated me!—but I will go on)—and M[onkhouse], the noble-minded kinsman, by wedlock, of W[ordsworth]; and H. C. R[obinson], unwearied in the offices of a friend; and Clarkson, almost above the narrowness of that relation, yet condescending not seldom heretofore from the labours of his world-embracing charity to bless my humble roof; and the gall-less and single-minded Dyer; and the high-minded associate of Cook, the veteran Colonel [Phillips], with his lusty heart still sending cartels of defiance to old Time; and, not least, W. A[yrton], the last and steadiest left to me of that little knot of whist-players, that used to assemble weekly, for so many years, at the Queen's Gate (you remember them, Sir?) and called Admiral Burney friend.

Lamb then went on more particularly to defend Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt against Southey's disapproval.

The Letter created some little stir in literary circles. The *Times* defended its writer:—

The number just published of the *London Magazine* contains a curious letter from Elia (Charles Lamb) to Mr. Southey. It treats the laureate with that contempt which his always uncandid and frequently malignant spirit deserves. When it is considered that Mr. Lamb has been the fast friend of Southey, and is besides of a particularly kind and peaceable nature, it is evident that nothing but gross provocation could have roused him to this public declaration of his disgust.

Professor Wilson (Christopher North), in *Blackwood*, on the other hand, administered heavy castigation:—

Our dearly-beloved friend, Charles Lamb, (we would fain call him ELIA; but that, as he himself says, "would be as good as naming him,") what is this you are doing? Mr. Southey, having read your Essays, wished to pay you a compliment, and called them, in the "Quarterly," "a book which wants only a sounder religious feeling, to be as delightful as it is original!" And with this eulogy you are not only dissatisfied, but so irate at the Laureate, that nothing will relieve your bile, but a Letter to the Doctor of seven good pages in "The London." Prodigious! Nothing would content your highness (not serene) of the India-House, but such a sentence as would sell your lucubrations as a puff; and because Taylor and Hessey cannot send this to the newspapers, you wax sour, sulky, and vituperative of your old crony, and twit him with his "old familiar faces." This is, our dear Charles, most unreasonable—most unworthy of you; and we know not how to punish you with sufficient severity, now that



Hodge of Tortola is no more; but the inflexible Higgins of Nevis still survives, and we must import him to flog you in the market-place.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge and Hazlitt, however, both commended Lamb; and Crabb Robinson called the Letter "delightful." In his *Diary* (just returned from his holiday) he writes: "October 26th:—I met with Talfourd, and heard from him much of the literary gossip of the last quarter. Sutton Sharpe, whom I called on, gave me a second edition, and lent me the last *London Magazine*, containing Lamb's delightful letter to Southey, which Southey must feel. His remarks on religion are full of deep feeling, and his eulogy on Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt most generous. Lamb must be aware that he would expose himself to obloquy by such declarations. It seems that he and Hazlitt are no longer on friendly terms. I do not wish them to be reconciled. L. has introduced the names or initials of his friends. I was gratified by finding in the Catalogue 'H. C. R. unwearied in every office of a friend.' Nothing that Lamb has ever written has impressed me more strongly with the sweetness of his disposition, the strength of his affections."<sup>2</sup>

Again, writing to Dorothy Wordsworth on October 31st, Robinson says: "You have seen Elia's letter to Southey. There are a few passages I could wish away, but with the exception of them it is a delightful composition. I do not think he has bribed me to this judgment. There is a generosity in this writing almost heroic—Lamb is well aware that he *alone* has been taken into favour by the public of those—

'five other wandering bards that move  
In sweet accord of harmony and love.'<sup>3</sup>

He knows that there are not two characters more generally detested in the country than L. H. and W. H. and that he will never be forgiven for this vo[lunta]ry tho' qualified and discriminating testimony in their favour. My dislike of Hazlitt almost amounts to hatred, yet I shall have inclination to look kindly on him when I recollect that L. has *so* written of

<sup>1</sup> A reference to Lamb's *Elia* essay on Christ's Hospital.

<sup>2</sup> Nearly a year later Robinson has this entry, while on circuit: "August 12th, 1824:—All day in Court. In one cause I held a brief under Henry Cooper. The attorney, a stranger, Garwood, of Wells, told me that he was informed by his friend Evans (the son of my old friend, Joseph Evans), that I was the H. C. R. mentioned in the *London Magazine* as the friend of Elia. 'I love Elia,' said Mr. Garwood; 'and that was enough to make me come to you!'"

<sup>3</sup> See page 136.

him. . . . Stewart Rose says that the sale of his Letters from Italy was stopped at once on account of a hint in the Quarterly that there were some *improprieties* in the book, and I have no doubt that Southey has utterly ruined the sale of *Elia*, and perhaps the popularity of Lamb for ever as a writer, by his article. If L. were above regarding the sale of his books, he need not fear that his reputation would suffer, for the article is flattering enough to his genius.

"However," Robinson adds, "I believe it was an inadvertence of S. only"; and Southey's wholly admirable letter in reply to Lamb bears out Robinson's opinion. It is dated November 19th, 1823:—

"MY DEAR LAMB—On Monday I saw your letter in the *London Magazine*, which I had not before had an opportunity of seeing, and I now take the first interval of leisure for replying to it.

"Nothing could be further from my mind than any intention or apprehension of any way offending or injuring a man concerning whom I have never spoken, thought, or felt otherwise than with affection, esteem, and admiration.

"If you had let me know in any private or friendly manner that you felt wounded by a sentence in which nothing but kindness was intended—or that you found it might injure the sale of your book—I would most readily and gladly have inserted a note in the next Review to qualify and explain what had hurt you.

"You have made this impossible, and I am sorry for it. But I will not engage in controversy with you to make sport for the Philistines.

"The provocation must be strong indeed that can rouse me to do this, even with an enemy. And if you can forgive an unintended offence as heartily as I do the way in which you have resented it, there will be nothing to prevent our meeting as we have heretofore done, and feeling towards each other as we have always been wont to do.

"Only signify a correspondent willingness on your part, and send me your address, and my first business next week shall be to reach your door, and shake hands with you and your sister. Remember me to her most kindly and believe me—Yours, with unabated esteem and regards,

"ROBERT SOUTHEY."

Lamb replied at once, and his answer shows that the *Quarterly* rather than Southey was the especial object of his wrath—the *Quarterly*, which had in 1811 referred to him as a “maniac,” in 1814 doctored his review of Wordsworth, and in 1822 stated as a fact that the “Confessions of a Drunkard” were autobiographical.

“DEAR SOUTHEY—The kindness of your note has melted away the mist which was upon me. I have been fighting against a shadow. That accursed Q. R. had vexed me by a gratuitous speaking, of its own knowledge, that the *Confessions of a D——d* was a genuine description of the state of the writer. Little things, that are not ill meant, may produce much ill. *That* might have injured me alive and dead. I am in a public office, and my life is insured. I was prepared for anger, and I thought I saw, in a few obnoxious words, a hard case of repetition directed against me. I wish both magazine and review at the bottom of the sea. I shall be ashamed to see you, and my sister (though innocent) will be still more so; for the folly was done without her knowledge, and has made her uneasy ever since. My guardian angel was absent at that time.

“I will muster up courage to see you, however, any day next week (Wednesday excepted). We shall hope that you will bring Edith with you. That will be a second mortification. She will hate to see us; but come and heap embers. We deserve it; I for what I’ve done, and she for being my sister.

“Do come early in the day, by sun-light, that you may see my *Milton*.

“I am at Colebrook Cottage, Colebrook Row, Islington: a detached whitish house, close to the New River end of Colebrook Terrace, left hand from Sadler’s Wells.

“Will you let me know the day before?

“Your penitent,

“C. LAMB.

“P.S.—I do not think your handwriting at all like \*\*\*\*’s. I do not think many things I did think.”<sup>1</sup>

Southey, as he promised, did not make any public rejoinder. But in 1830, when the *Literary Gazette* treated Lamb’s *Album*

<sup>1</sup>In the “Letter to Southey” Lamb had said that he had opened letters from Leigh Hunt hoping they were from Southey—such was the similarity of their hands.



*Verses* with derision and contempt, he sent to the *Times*, as we shall see, a poem in praise of his friend.

Lamb's letter to Barton, dated September 2nd, had first told us that he had again moved. "When you come London-ward you will find me no longer in Covt. Gard. I have a Cottage, in Colebrook row, Islington. A cottage, for it is detach'd; a white house, with 6 good rooms, the New River (rather elderly by this time) runs (if a moderate walking pace can be so termed) close to the foot of the house; and behind is a spacious garden, with vines (I assure you), pears, strawberries, parsnips, leeks, carrots, cabbages, to delight the heart of old Alcinous. You enter without passage into a cheerful dining room, all studded over and rough with old Books, and above is a lightsome Drawing room, 3 windows, full of choice prints. I feel like a great Lord, never having had a house before. . . .

"I am so taken up with pruning and gardening, quite a new sort of occupation to me. I have gather'd my Jargonels, but my Windsor Pears are backward. The former were of exquisite raciness. I do now sit under my own vine, and contemplate the growth of vegetable nature. I can now understand in what sense they speak of FATHER ADAM. I recognise the paternity, while I watch my tulips. I almost FELL with him, for the first day I turned a drunken gard'ner (as he let in the serpent) into my Eden, and he laid about him, lopping off some choice boughs, &c., which hung over from a neighbor's garden, and in his blind zeal laid waste a shade, which had sheltered their window from the gaze of passers by. The old gentlewoman (fury made her not handsome) could scarcely be reconciled by all my fine words. There was no buttering her parsnips. She talk'd of the Law. What a lapse to commit on the first day of my happy 'garden-state.'"

In a "Wishing Cap" article in the *Examiner* for April 4th, 1824, Leigh Hunt thus addresses Lamb on his change of abode: "C. L., why didst thou ever quit Russell Street? Why didst thou leave the warm crowd of humanity, which thou lovest so well, to go and shiver on the side of the New River, inticing thy unwary friends to walk in? Were friends and sittings up at night too attractive? And was there no other way to get rid of them? Reader, we have not waked the night-owl with a catch, for C. L. is not musical. He will put up with nothing but

snatches of old songs. Mozart is to him an alien, and Paesiello the Pope of Rome. . . .

“What would I not give for another Thursday evening? It was humanity’s triumph; for whist-players and no whist-players there for the first time met together. Talk not to me of great houses in which such things occur; for there the whist-players are gamblers, and the no whist-players are nobody at all. Here, the whist was for its own sake, and yet the non-players were tolerated. But the triumph went further. Here was R. [Rickman] to represent among us the plumpness of office, and the solidity of the government. My brother Reformer, W. H. [Hazlitt], came to rest his disappointments and his paradoxes. Vain expectation! With him contended A. [Ayrton], the most well-bred of musicians, who hates a paradox like an unresolved discord. Another A. [? Alsager] was there, the best of neighbours; especially if you happen to be confined to your room. Item, a third A. [Allsop], the most trusting of linen-draperies, who lent [*i.e.*, gave] a poet [Coleridge] a hundred pounds. I do not know whether he has been paid. I hope not; for he deserves to enjoy the interest for ever, and in his case it is a rich one. M. B. [Burney] was one of us, having his hands in his waistcoat pockets, like his friend, and talking well upon episodes.

“And thou, M. L.,—why have I not the art, like the old writers of dedications, of at once loading thee with panegyric, and saving the shoulders of thy modesty? An art, by-the-by, which was so conspicuously concealed, that nobody would have suspected them of having it. There also came old Captain B. [Burney], who had been round the world with Cooke, and was the first man who planted a pun in Otaheite. Nevertheless, though I met him fifty times, I never had the courage to address him, he appeared to be so wrapped up in his tranquillity and his whist. He seemed to be taking a long repose from his storms. The jovial face of Colonel P. [Phillips], blooming with a second youth, made me bolder. He had been round the world also, when a boy, and had challenged his lieutenant for not standing closer by his captain. This illegality completed my confidence. With K. [Kenney] we rejoiced over his successful plays, and tried to be indifferent over the others.”

Lamb’s new house, Colebrooke Cottage, in Colebrooke Row, still stands. A neighbouring terrace joins it on one side, so that

it is no longer detached, and the New River has been covered and railed in ; but inside, the house is much as it was. Lamb, as we learn from a note to Allsop, moved alone, his sister still being ill.

Bernard Barton and his daughter journeyed to Islington not long after the move, and of this visit Lucy Barton (Mrs. Edward FitzGerald) wrote an account for me, in 1892, some seventy years later. Mary Lamb, she thinks, was from home at the time. What principally remained in Mrs. FitzGerald's mind was the circumstance that many of Lamb's books in his bookcase retained the white price labels that had been pasted on them by the second-hand booksellers. She also recollected that lunch consisted of oysters with their usual accompaniments.

We have a description of Colebrooke Cottage in Hood's recollections of Lamb in *Hood's Own*. It was, he says (in reference to Coleridge's ballad "The Devil's Walk"), "a cottage of Ungentility, for it had neither double coach-house nor wings. Like its tenant, it stood alone. He said, glancing at the Pater-noster one, that he did not like 'the Row.' There was a bit of a garden, in which, being, as he professed, more fond of 'Men Sects than of Insects,' he made probably his first and last observation in Entomology. He had been watching a spider in a gooseberry bush, entrapping a fly. 'Good God,' he said, 'I never saw such a thing! Directly he was caught in her fatal spinning, she darted down upon him, and in a minute turned him out, completely lapped in a shroud! It reminded me of the Fatal Sisters in Gray.'"

It is to the Colebrooke period that George Daniel's reminiscences of Lamb chiefly belong, printed in his *Love's Last Labour Not Lost* in 1863. Daniel (who was born in 1789 and was therefore nearly fourteen years younger than Lamb), like Hone, another of Lamb's antiquarian friends, whom we shall soon see, had been an assiduous satirist of the Regent, but his principal work was the editing of Cumberland's *British Theatre* in thirty-nine volumes. He first met Lamb in 1817, but it was not until the essayist became his neighbour in Islington that they were at all intimate. Daniel writes of those days (thus fortifying Lamb's remark to Barton, in the letter above, which looked a little like invention): "He took to the culture of plants, and now, having been honoured with his commands, I was, for the first time, of some use to him. He watched the growth of his tulips with the





COLEBROOKE COTTAGE, LAMB'S HOUSE AT ISLINGTON, AND  
THE NEW RIVER

(FROM A CONTEMPORARY WATER-COLOUR DRAWING.)



gusto of a veteran florist and became learned in all their gaudy varieties. He grew enamoured of anemones. He planted, pruned, and grafted; and seldom walked abroad without a bouquet in his button-hole! The rose, from its poetical associations with Carew's exquisite song,—

‘Ask me no more, &c.’

was his favourite flower.”

Of Lamb's interest in birds Daniel says: “They congregated upon his grass-plot, perched upon his window-sills, nestled in the eaves of his house-top, responded to his whistle, pecked up his plum cake. . . . It became one of his amusements to watch their motions. ‘Commend me,’ he said, ‘to the sparrows for what our friend Mathews calls in his ‘At Home’ “irregular appropriation.” I remember seeing a precocious Newgate-bird snatch from the muckle-mouth of a plethoric prentice-boy a hissing-hot slice of plum-pudding, and transfer it to his own, to the diversion of the bystanders, who could not forbear laughing at the urchin's mendacious dexterity; but this sleight of hand feat is nothing to the celerity with which these feathered freebooters will make a tid-bit exchange beaks.’ Seeing his growing fondness for birds, I offered him a beautiful bullfinch ensconced in a handsome cage. But he declined the present. ‘Every song that it sung from its wiry prison,’ said he, ‘I could never flatter myself was meant for my ear; but rather a wistful note to the passing travellers of air that it were with them too! This would make me self-reproachful and sad. Yet I should be loth to let the little captive fly, lest, being unused to liberty it should flutter itself to death, or starve.’” (These words obviously are the words of Daniel, although the sentiment may be Lamb's.)

Of Lamb's excursions Daniel says: “His occasional rambles rarely extended beyond Finchley, on the north; Dulwich College (for its pictures!), on the south; and Turnham-green, on the west. The east with its narrow and tortuous *carrefours*, was unknown to him.” Lamb was very fond of seeing the sun set from Canonbury Tower: “he was hand and glove with Goodman Symes, the then tenant of this venerable Tower, and a brother antiquary in a small way, who took pleasure in entertaining him in the oak panelled chamber where Goldsmith wrote his *Traveller* and supped on buttermilk; pointing at the same time to a small



coloured portrait of Shakespeare, in a curiously carved gilt frame, which Lamb would look at lovingly. . . . He was never weary of toiling up and down the steep, winding, narrow stairs of this suburban pile, and peeping into its sly corners and cupboards, as if he expected to discover there some hitherto hidden clue to its mysterious origin. The ancient hostelrys of Islington and its vicinity he also visited. At the old *Queen's Head* he puffed his pipe, and quaffed his ale out of the huge tankard presented by a certain festive Master Cranch, of a Bonifacial aspect and hue, to a former host."

Daniel adds: "It was here [the old Queen Head—Islington] that he chanced to fall in with that obese and burly figure of fun Theodore Hook, who came to take a last look at this historical relic before it was pulled down. Hook accompanied him to Colebrooke Cottage which was hard by. During the evening Lamb (lightsome and lissom) proposed a race round the garden; but Hook . . . declined the contest, remarking that he could outrun nobody but 'the constable.'" This is the only meeting between Lamb and Hook of which I can find a record. Hook, supposing the year to be 1826 (he was in prison from 1823 to 1825), was then thirty-eight.

A few of Lamb's detached sayings as reported by George Daniel are interesting; but too much credence must not perhaps be placed in the narrative of the friendship, which was probably only an acquaintanceship. He once remarked, "Socrates loved wild boar, Sophocles truffles, and why should not pig's meat be my gastronomical vanity?" And speaking once of Abraham, he said that he would have respected him more if he had not spoken falsely to save himself and his wife at the court of Pharaoh. Of the "mean duplicity" of Jacob he spoke with sorrow.

Daniel was a friend of Robert Bloomfield, author of "The Farmer's Boy," who in those days lived in Islington. He speaks of dining with Lamb and Bloomfield at Colebrooke Cottage in the autumn of 1823, and afterwards walking to Queen Elizabeth's Walk at Stoke Newington. But it must have been earlier, for Bloomfield died in August of that year. Writing to Barton in 1823 Lamb says of Bloomfield: "He dined with me once, and his manners took me exceedingly." We can, however, hardly include the rural poet among Lamb's friends. (Many years earlier when Lamb first met him, under Dyer's wing, he thought him "very poor company.")

During September both Charles and Mary Lamb seem to have been in very poor health; and Lamb made his will, with Allsop, Talfourd and Procter as executors. Later he reduced the number of executors to two, Talfourd and Ryle. In the letter to Allsop making the request Lamb says, "I want to make my will, and to leave my property in trust for my sister. *N.B.* I am not *therefore* going to die;" and again, the next day, "I hope it may be in the scheme of Providence that my sister may go first (if ever so little a precedence)." As it happened, Providence directed otherwise. Cowden Clarke tells us that Lamb "once said (with his peculiar mode of tenderness, beneath blunt, abrupt speech), 'You must die first, Mary.' She nodded, with her little quiet nod, and sweet smile, 'Yes, I must die first, Charles.'"

By the middle of October both Lamb and his sister were well again. A note to Cary on October 14th, concerning a proposed visit, has this passage: "We were talking of Roast *Shoulder* of Mutton with onion sauce; but I scorn to prescribe to the hospitalities of mine host." And on October 31st Crabb Robinson writes to Dorothy Wordsworth: "The Lambs are now well. . . . Miss L. has been ill all this summer; she is now looking well, and the better because thinner."

It was a few days later that George Dyer, as we saw in Chapter XIV., walked into the New River from Lamb's garden. Lamb tells Mrs. Hazlitt about it in an amusing letter. He adds: "I had the honour of dining at the Mansion House on Thursday last, by special card from the Lord Mayor, who never saw my face, nor I his; and all from being a writer in a magazine! The dinner costly, served on massy plate; champagne, pines, &c.; 47 present, among whom the Chairman and two other directors of the India Company. There's for you! and got away pretty sober! Quite saved my credit!" So ends 1823.

## CHAPTER XLI

1824

A Lethargy—Hazlitt's *Select British Poets*—Manning Rapt—Peter George Patmore—A Parody of Lamb—Lamb's Clothes—William Blake—Byron's Death—Munden's Farewell—Lamb and Mrs. Barbauld Again—Some "Maddish Spirits"—An Evening with Coleridge—Edward Irving—Procter's Marriage—Mary Russell Mitford—A Warning to Barton—"Saint Charles."

**B**ETWEEN December, 1823, and September, 1824, Lamb published nothing; his health seems to have been indifferent and his spirits low. But towards the end of the year came a revival, when for a while he was again busy and now and then almost at his best.

Writing to Barton on January 23rd he says: "The fact is I have been insuperably dull and lethargic for many weeks, and cannot rise to the vigour of a Letter, much less an Essay. The 'London' must do without me for a time, a time, and half a time, for I have lost all interest about it, and whether I shall recover it again I know not. . . . I shall begin to feel a little more alive with the spring. Winter is to me (mild or harsh) always a great trial of the spirits." Again, a month later: ". . . And yet I am accounted by some people a good man. How cheap that character is acquired! Pay your debts, don't borrow money, nor twist your kitten's neck off, or disturb a congregation, &c.—your business is done. I know things (thoughts or things, thoughts are things) of myself which would make every friend I have fly me as a plague patient. I once \* \* \*, and set a dog upon a crab's leg that was shoved out under a moss of sea weeds, a pretty little feeler.—Oh! pah! how sick I am of that; and a lie, a mean one, I once told!—

"I stink in the midst of respect.

"I am much hypt; the fact is, my head is heavy; but there is hope, or if not, I am better than a poor shell fish—not morally,



when I set the whelp upon it, but have more blood and spirits. Things may turn up, and I may creep again into a decent opinion of myself. Vanity will return with sunshine."

A little later vanity did return: "While I have space, let me congratulate with you the return of the Spring—what a Summery Spring too! all those qualms about the dog and the cray-fish melt before it. I am going to be happy and vain again."

Meanwhile we have glimpses of the Lambs in Crabb Robinson's *Diary*:—

"January 10th, 1824:—Walked out and called on Miss Lamb. I looked over Lamb's library in part. He has the finest collection of shabby books I ever saw; such a number of first-rate works of genius, but filthy copies, which a delicate man would really hesitate touching, is I think nowhere to be found. I borrowed several books.

"Jan. 25:—I walked up to Lamb's, Southerne with me. I did not understand that he waited for me and kept him a long time. At length he knocked and came in. . . . N.B. Hazlitt at Lamb's. We did not speak." Henry Southern (1799-1852?) was the founder and editor of the *Retrospective Review*, and it was he who bought the *London Magazine* in 1825. Later he entered diplomatic life.

Hazlitt, who was about to marry the widow Bridgewater and disappear on his continental tour, was now lodging in Down Street, Piccadilly. He had written in his essay on "The Pleasures of Hating" that the "magnanimous" "Letter to Southey" made him want to be friends with Lamb again; and a restored relation of cordiality, destined to be permanent, was shortly afterwards established. I fancy also that Hazlitt had consulted Lamb upon the volume of extracts for the *Select British Poets* which he had been commissioned to prepare. The first edition was published in 1824, Lamb being represented by no fewer than eighteen poems and two extracts from "John Woodvil," and Mary Lamb by two poems. Of Lamb, Hazlitt wrote: "Mr. C. Lamb has produced no poems equal to his prose writings: but I could not resist the temptation of transferring into this collection his 'Farewell to Tobacco,' and some of the sketches in his 'John Woodvil,' the first of which is rarely surpassed in quaint wit, and the last in pure feeling." Hazlitt had, however, exceeded his rights; certain publishers objected that he had taken their property; and the

book was suppressed, a new edition being issued in 1825 with no living authors included.

I return to Crabb Robinson :—

“Feb. 19 :—At Lamb’s to leave a magazine. Miss L. being alone I was tempted to dine with her and a very agreeable two hours from 3 to 5 I had. With her I can unbosom myself cordially.

“Feb. 29, Sunday :—Went to Lamb’s. Fanny Holcroft &c. there. Walked with F. : she is grown *old* and an object of compassion.” Fanny Holcroft, Thomas Holcroft’s daughter, was the author of several novels and other literary work. She died in 1844.

“March 5th :—Walked over to Lamb. Meant a short visit, but Monkhouse was there as well as Manning ; so I took tea and stayed the whole evening, and played whist. Besides, the talk was agreeable. On religion, M[anning] talked as I did not expect ; rather earnestly on the Atonement, as the essential doctrine of Christianity, but against the Trinity, which he thinks by a mere mistake has been adopted from Oriental philosophy, under a notion that it was necessary to the Atonement. C. L.’s impressions against religion are unaccountably strong, and yet he is by nature pious. It is the dogmatism of theology which has disgusted him, and which alone he opposes ; he has the organ of theosophy.” Of Manning in a religious, or at least in a mystical, mood Allsop gives us this glimpse : “I retain a very vivid recollection of Manning, though so imperfect in my memory of persons that I should not recollect him at this time. I think few persons had so great a share of Lamb’s admiration, for to few did he vouchsafe manifestations of his *very* extraordinary powers. Once, and once only, did I witness an outburst of his *unembodied* spirit, when such was the effect of his more than magnetic, his magic power (learnt was it in Chaldea, or in that sealed continent to which the superhuman knowledge of Zoroaster was conveyed by Confucius, into which he was the first to penetrate with impunity), that we were all rapt and carried aloft into the seventh heaven. He seemed to see and to convey to us clearly (I had almost said adequately), what was passing in the presence of the Great Disembodied ONE, rather by an intuition or the creation of a new sense than by words. Verily there are *more things on earth* than are dreamt of in our philosophy. I am unwilling to admit the influence this

wonderful man had over his auditors, as I cannot at all convey an adequate notion or even image of his extraordinary and very peculiar powers."

In the spring of this year Peter George Patmore, whom we last saw as Scott's second in the fatal duel, comes upon the scene. Patmore, who was the father of Coventry Patmore, tells the story thus (but very loosely) in *My Friends and Acquaintances*: "My first introduction to Charles Lamb took place accidentally, at the lodgings of William Hazlitt, in Down St., Piccadilly, in 1824, and under circumstances which have impressed it with peculiar vividness on my memory. Mr. Colburn had published anonymously, only two or three days before, a *jeu-d'esprit* of mine, which aimed at being, to the prose literature of the day, something like what the *Rejected Addresses* was to the poetry. . . . Scarcely had I been introduced to the new-comers, when Hazlitt pointed to the book which he had laid on the table on their entrance, and said to Miss Lamb, 'There's something there about Charles and you. Have you seen it?' Miss Lamb immediately took up the book, and began to read to herself (evidently with no very good will) the opening paper, which was an imitation of an *Essay by Elia*.

"Here was an accumulation of embarrassments, which no consideration could have induced me to encounter willingly, but which, being inevitable, I contrived to endure with great apparent composure; though the awkwardness of my position was not a little enhanced by Miss Lamb presently turning to her brother, and expressing feelings about what she had read, which indicated that her first impression was anything but a favourable or agreeable one. Lamb himself seemed to take no interest whatever in the matter. They stayed but a very short time."

Patmore's book, called *Rejected Articles*, is a collection of very poor imitations: that of Lamb being peculiarly inadequate. Patmore, however, has left some valuable notes upon Lamb. I quote from an article in the *Court Magazine* for 1835. He writes: "Lamb had laid aside his *snuff-coloured* suit before I knew him; and during the last ten years of his life, he was never seen in any thing but a suit of uniform black, with knee-breeches, and (sometimes, not always) gaiters of the same to meet them. Probably he was induced to admit this innovation by a sort of



compromise with his affection for the colour of other years; for though his dress was 'black' in name and nature, he always contrived that it should exist only in a state of rusty brown. I can scarcely account for his having left off his suit of the latter colour, especially as he had stuck to it through the daily ordeal, for twenty years, of the Long Room of the East India House. He abandoned it, I think, somewhere about the time his friend Wordsworth put forth his *ideal* of the personal appearance of a *poet*; which may perchance have been drawn, in part, from Lamb himself,—so exact is the likeness in several leading particulars.

'But who is he, *with modest looks,*  
*And clad in homely russet brown,*  
 Who murmurs near the running brooks  
 A music sweeter than their own?

'He is retired as noontide dew,  
 Or fountain in a noonday grove;  
*And you must love him e'er to you*  
*He will seem worthy of your love.'*

"Now Lamb did not like to be taken for a poet, or for any thing else; so, latterly, he always dressed in a way to be taken, by ninety-nine people out of a hundred who looked at him, for a Methodist preacher! the last person in the world that he really *was* like! This was one of his little wilful contradictions."

Patmore, to whom we shall return, relates also a piquant but merciless story of Lamb's treatment of a pretentious minor poet. "He was to meet the gentleman at dinner, and the poems were shown to Lamb a little before the author's arrival. When he came he proved to be empty and conceited. During dinner Lamb fell into the delightful drollery of saying now and again, 'That reminds me of some verses I wrote when I was very young;' and then quoted a line or two which he recollected from the gentleman's book, to the latter's amazement and indignation. Lamb, immensely diverted, capped it all by introducing the first lines of *Paradise Lost*, 'Of man's first disobedience,' as also written by himself, which actually brought the gentleman on his feet bursting with rage. He said he had sat by and allowed his own 'little verses' to be taken without protest, but he could not endure to see Milton pillaged." A similar story is told of Macaulay, but in his case he is said to have

remembered and repeated, as he was able to do after one perusal, whole pages of his victim.

On March 24th we find Lamb advising Barton to have no hesitation in accepting a gift of £1,200 which some members of the Society of Friends had raised as a testimony to their sense of his merit: "Every man is his own best Casuist; and after all, as Ephraim Smooth, in the pleasant comedy of 'Wild Oats,' has it, 'there is no harm in a Guinea.' A fortiori there is less in £2,000."

The best letter of 1824 is that to Barton on May 15th, concerning William Blake (whom Lamb calls Robert). "Blake is a real name, I assure you, and a most extraordinary man, if he be still living. He is the Robert [William] Blake, whose wild designs accompany a splendid folio edition of the 'Night Thoughts,' which you may have seen, in one of which he pictures the parting of soul and body by a solid mass of human form floating off, God knows how, from a lumpish mass (*fac Simile* to itself) left behind on the dying bed. He paints in water colours marvellous strange pictures, visions of his brain, which he asserts that he has seen. They have great merit. He has *seen* the old Welsh bards on Snowdon—he has seen the Beautifullest, the strongest, and the Ugliest Man, left alone from the Massacre of the Britons by the Romans, and has painted them from memory (I have seen his paintings), and asserts them to be as good as the figures of Raphael and Angelo, but not better, as they had precisely the same retro-visions and prophetic visions with themselves [himself]. The painters in oil (which he will have it that neither of them practised) he affirms to have been the ruin of art, and affirms that all the while he was engaged in his Water paintings, Titian was disturbing him, Titian the Ill Genius of Oil Painting. His Pictures—one in particular, the Canterbury Pilgrims (far above Stothard's)—have great merit, but hard, dry, yet with grace. He has written a Catalogue of them with a most spirited criticism on Chaucer, but mystical and full of Vision. His poems have been sold hitherto only in Manuscript. I never read them; but a friend at my desire procured the 'Sweep Song.' There is one to a tiger, which I have heard recited, beginning—

'Tiger, Tiger, burning bright,  
Thro' the deserts of the night,'

which is glorious, but, alas ! I have not the book ; for the man is flown, whither I know not—to Hades or a Mad House. But I must look on him as one of the most extraordinary persons of the age.”

Blake was then living in Fountain Court, Strand, and was working on the Inventions to the Book of Job. He died in 1827. Lamb never met him, but Crabb Robinson had long conversations with him, and among the younger men who appreciated Blake’s genius was, as we have seen, Wainewright, from whom Lamb may have heard of the sturdy mystic. Lamb sent the “Sweep’s Song” for an album which James Montgomery edited in the interests of a philanthropic effort to ameliorate the lot of the climbing boys.

In the same letter in which Lamb writes of Blake he refers thus to the death of Byron, which had occurred on April 19th : “So we have lost another Poet. I never much relished his Lordship’s mind, and shall be sorry if the Greeks have cause to miss him. He was to me offensive, and I never can make out his great *power*, which his admirers talk of. Why, a line of Wordsworth’s is a lever to lift the immortal spirit ! Byron can only move the Spleen. He was at best a Satyrst,—in any other way, he was mean enough. I dare say I do him injustice ; but I cannot love him, nor squeeze a tear to his memory. He did not like the world, and he has left it, as Alderman Curtis advised the Radicals, ‘If they don’t like their country, damn ’em, let ’em leave it,’ they possessing no rood of ground in England, and he 10,000 acres. Byron was better than many Curtises.”

On May 31st, 1824, says Talfourd, “one of Lamb’s last ties to the theatre, as a scene of present enjoyment, was severed. Munden, the rich peculiarities of whose acting Lamb has embalmed in one of the choicest ‘Essays of Elia,’ quitted the stage in the mellowness of his powers. His relish for Munden’s acting was almost a new sense : he did not compare him with the old comedians, as having common qualities with them, but regarded him as altogether of a different and original style. On the last night of his appearance, Lamb was very desirous to attend, but every place in the boxes had long been secured ; and Lamb was not strong enough to stand the tremendous rush, by enduring which, alone, he could hope to obtain a place in the pit ; when Munden’s gratitude for his exquisite praise anticipated his wish,



by providing for him and Miss Lamb places in a corner of the orchestra, close to the stage.

"The play of the 'Poor Gentleman,' in which Munden played 'Sir Robert Bramble,' had concluded, and the audience were impatiently waiting for the farce, in which the great comedian was to delight them for the last time, when my attention was suddenly called to Lamb by Miss Kelly, who sat with my party far withdrawn into the obscurity of one of the Upper Boxes, but overlooking the radiant hollow which waved below us, to our friend.<sup>1</sup> In his hand, directly beneath the line of stage-lights, glistened a huge porter pot, which he was draining; while the broad face of old Munden was seen thrust out from the door by which the musicians enter, watching the close of the draught, when he might receive and hide the portentous beaker from the gaze of the admiring neighbours. Some unknown benefactor had sent four pots of stout to keep up the veteran's heart during his last trial; and, not able to drink them all, he bethought him of Lamb, and without considering the wonder which would be excited in the brilliant crowd who surrounded him, conveyed himself the cordial chalice to Lamb's parched lips. At the end of the same farce, Munden found himself unable to deliver from memory a short and elegant address which one of his sons had written for him; but, provided against accidents, took it from his pocket, wiped his eyes, put on his spectacles, read it, and made his last bow. This was, perhaps, the last night when Lamb took a hearty interest in the present business scene; for though he went now and then to the theatre to gratify Miss Isola, or to please an author who was his friend, his real stage henceforth only spread itself out in the selectest chambers of his memory." That was also the occasion, the Cowden Clarkes tell us, of Mary Lamb's pun, "Sic transit gloria Munden."

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* again:—

"June 1st, 1824:—I was induced to engage myself to dine with C. Lamb. After dinner he and I took a walk to Newington. I sat an hour with Mrs. Barbauld. She was looking tolerably, but Lamb (not his habit) was disputatious with her, and not in his best way. He reasons from feelings, and those often idiosyncrasies; she from dry abstractions and verbal definitions. Such people can't agree, and infallibly dislike each other.

<sup>1</sup> This is Talfourd's grammar—I have not altered it.

We came back to a late dish of tea. Godwin &c. there. I had whist with M. L., G. and his ill-bred son William. The loud laugh of the father and the noisy knock on the table of the son together put me out of humour, and I came away early, though there came in some agreeable people." Godwin's son, who was then twenty-one, had just become a reporter on the *Morning Chronicle*. He died in 1832. He does not come into the life of Lamb directly, but indirectly we have to thank him, for it was he who by his importunity as a caller inspired Lamb to the little essay called "Many Friends," in the *New Times* in 1825.

"June 10th :—I dined at Lamb's, and then walked with him to Highgate [to Gillman's], self-invited. There we found a large party. Mr. and Mrs. Green, the Aderses, Irving, Collins, R. A., a Mr. Taylor, a young man of talents in the Colonial Office, Basil Montagu, a Mr. Chance, and one or two others. It was a *rich* evening. Coleridge talked his best, and it appeared better because he and Irving supported the same doctrines. His superiority was striking. The idea dwelt on was the higher character of the internal evidence of Christianity, as addressed to our immediate consciousness of our own wants and the necessity of a religion and a revelation. In a style not to me clear or intelligible Irving and Coleridge both declaimed. The *advocatus diaboli* for the evening was Mr. Taylor, who, in a way very creditable to his manners as a gentleman, but with little more than verbal cleverness, and an ordinary logic, and the confidence of a young man who has no suspicion of his own deficiencies, affirmed that those evidences which the Christian thinks he finds in his internal convictions, the Mahometan also thinks he has; and he affirmed that Mahomet had improved the condition of mankind. Lamb asked him whether he came in a turban or a hat." This story of Taylor (Henry Taylor, afterwards the author of *Philip van Artevelde*) is told more fully and more amusingly elsewhere. It seems that Taylor, when it was time to go, could not find his hat. During the search Lamb remarked, "I thought you came in a turban."

"On my walk with Lamb," Robinson continues, "he spoke with enthusiasm of Manning, . . . the most *wonderful* man he ever knew, more extraordinary than Wordsworth or Coleridge. Yet this M. does nothing. He has travelled even in China, and has been by land from India through Thibet, yet, as far as is

known, he has written nothing. Lamb says his criticisms are of the very first quality.

“July 5th :—I . . . took tea at Lamb’s. Mr. Irving and his friend, Mr. Carlyle, were there. An agreeable evening enough ; but there is so little sympathy between Lamb and Irving, that I do not think they can or ought to be intimate. L. has no respect for I.’s opinion—perhaps not for his mind. I ought not to like L. whose levity and want of serious thought is incurable.” This was not the visit from Carlyle, then a young man of nearly twenty-nine, which led to the famous passage in his *Diary*, but an earlier. Lamb’s attitude to Edward Irving (1792-1834), who was then drawing all London to his chapel in Hatton Garden, was either misunderstood by Robinson or it speedily underwent a change ; for in March, 1825, he writes to Barton : “While I can write, let me abjure you to have no doubts of Irving. Let Mr. Mitford drop his disrespect. Irving has prefixed a dedication (of a Missionary Subject, 1st part) to Coleridge, the most beautiful, cordial and sincere. He there acknowledges his obligation to S. T. C. for his knowledge of Gospel truths, the nature of a Christian Church, etc., to the talk of S. T. C. (at whose Gamaliel feet he sits weekly) [? more] than to that of all the men living. This from him, the great dandled and petted Sectarian—to a religious character so equivocal in the world’s Eye as that of S. T. C., so foreign to the Kirk’s estimate. Can this man be a quack ? The language is as affecting as the Spirit of the Dedication. Some friend [Mrs. Basil Montagu] told him, ‘This dedication will do you no Good,’ *i.e.* not in the world’s repute, or with your own People. ‘That is a reason for doing it,’ quoth Irving. I am thoroughly pleased with him. He is firm, outspoken, intrepid—and docile as a pupil of Pythagoras. You must like him.”

I quote from Crabb Robinson again :—

“July 6 :—Took tea with Lamb. There were Hessey and Taylor, Clare the shepherd poet, Bowring, and Elton the translator from the classics. Clare looks like a weak man—but he was ill—Elton a sturdy fellow more like a huntsman than a scholar. . . . Hessey gave an account of De Quincey’s description of his own bodily sufferings. He should have employed as his publishers, said Lamb, Payne and Fuss” (referring to Payne & Foss, book-sellers in Pall Mall).

The Lambs spent their holiday this year in the neighbourhood,



making short excursions into Hertfordshire. Writing to an old India House clerk, William Marter, on July 19th, Lamb says: "Pity me, that have been a Gentleman these four weeks, and am reduced in one day to the state of a ready writer. I feel, I feel, my gentlemanly qualities fast oozing away—such as a sense of honour, neckcloths twice a day, abstinence from swearing, &c. The desk enters into my soul."

A letter to Hood at Hastings, on August 10th, has high spirits: "My old New River has presented no extraordinary novelties lately; but there Hope sits every day, speculating upon traditionary gudgeons. I think she has taken the fisheries. I now know the reason why our forefathers were denominated East and West Angles. Yet is there no lack of spawn; for I wash my hands in fishets that come through the pump every morning thick as motelings,—little things o o o, like *that*, that perish untimely, and never taste the brook. . . . You should also go to No. 13, Standgate Street,—a baker, who has the finest collection of marine monsters in ten sea counties,—sea dragons, polypi, mer-people, most fantastic. You have only to name the old gentleman in black (not the Devil) that lodged with him a week (he'll remember) last July, and he will show courtesy. He is fond of the notice of the Savans. His wife is the funniest thwarting little animal! They are decidedly the Lions of green Hastings. [This was a practical joke. There was no such house in Hastings.] . . . I design to give up smoking; but I have not yet fixed upon the equivalent vice. I must have *quid pro quo*; or *quo pro quid*."

A month or so later, when sending Barton some Album Verses for his daughter, Lamb is "maddish" again, in that irresponsible strain which no one has had in such perfection as he. "I began on another sheet of paper, and just as I had penn'd the second line of Stanza 2 an ugly Blot [*here is a blot*] as big as this fell, to illustrate my counsel.—I am sadly given to blot, and modern blotting-paper gives no redress; it only smears and makes it worse, as for example [*here is a smear*]. The only remedy is scratching out, which gives it a Clerkish look. The most innocent blots are made with red ink, and are rather ornamental. [*Here are two or three blots in red ink.*] Marry, they are not always to be distinguished from the effusions of a cut finger.

"Well, I hope and trust thy Tick doleru, or however you spell

it, is vanished, for I have frightful impressions of that Tick, and do altogether hate it, as an unpaid score, or the Tick of a Death Watch. I take it to be a species of Vitus's dance (I omit the Sanctity, writing to 'one of the men called Friends'). I knew a young Lady who could dance no other, she danced thro' life, and very queer and fantastic were her steps. Heaven bless thee from such measures, and keep thee from the Foul Fiend, who delights to lead after False Fires in the night, Flibbertigibbit, that gives the web and the pin &c. I forget what else.—

"From my den, as Bunyan has it, 30 Sep. 24."

In September *Elia* was resumed, with "Blakesmoor in H—shire," and thereafter Lamb for a while worked for the *London Magazine* steadily once more.

On November 2nd he thanks Mrs. Collier for a pig. "To say it was young, crisp, short, luscious, dainty-toed, is but to say what all its predecessors have been. It was eaten on Sunday and Monday, and doubts only exist as to which temperature it eat best, hot or cold. I incline to the latter. The Petty-feet made a pretty surprising præ-gustation for supper on Saturday night, just as I was loathingly in expectation of bren-cheese. I spell as I speak.

"I do not know what news to send you. You will have heard of Alsager's death,<sup>1</sup> and your Son John's success in the Lottery. I say he is a wise man, if he leaves off while he is well. The weather is wet to weariness, but Mary goes puddling about a-shopping after a gown for the winter. She wants it good & cheap. Now I hold that no good things are cheap, pig-presents always excepted. In this mournful weather I sit moping, where I now write, in an office dark as Erebus, jammed in between 4 walls, and writing by Candle-light, most melancholy. Never see the light of the Sun six hours in the day, and am surprised to find how pretty it shines on Sundays. I wish I were a Caravan driver or a Penny post man, to earn my bread in air & sunshine."

On November 11th Lamb congratulates Procter on his marriage to Anne Skepper, Basil Montagu's stepdaughter. He adds characteristically: "I am married myself—to a severe step-wife—who keeps me, not at bed and board, but at desk and board, and is jealous of my morning aberrations. I cannot slip out to congratulate kinder unions. It is well she leaves me alone o' nights

<sup>1</sup> A matter of lie, explained later in the letter.

—the damn'd Day-hag BUSINESS. She is even now peeping over me to see I am writing no Love Letters. I come, my dear. Where is the Indigo Sale Book?"

Crabb Robinson again:—

"Dec. 5, Sunday:—Walked back by Islington and met there with Mr. and Mrs. Talfourd and Miss Mitford, the dramatist and poet, a squat person but with a benevolent and intelligent smile. Scarcely any conversation. Lamb merry.

"Dec. 10:—At ten went to Talfourd's, where were Haydon and his wife and Lamb and his sister. A very pleasant chat with them. Miss Mitford there, pleasing looks but no words." Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855) was at this time in the flush of the success of *Our Village*, the first series of which was published in 1824. There are a few glimpses of Lamb in her correspondence. Writing to Sir William Elford, concerning *Our Village*, in March, 1824, she says: "Charles Lamb (the matchless 'Elia' of the *London Magazine*) says that nothing so fresh and characteristic has appeared for a long while. It is not over modest to say this; but who would not be proud of the praise of such a *proser*?" Miss Mitford had the highest admiration of Lamb. "By the by," she writes to Elford in 1822, "do you ever see the *London Magazine*? Charles Lamb's articles, signed Elia, are incomparably the finest specimens of English prose in the language. The humour is as delicate as Addison's, and far more piquant."

The last letters of the year are to Leigh Hunt and Barton. That to Hunt, in Genoa, is chiefly a mendacious account of the conversion of the Novello family to Wesleyanism; but among the serious news is this: "Mary, my sister, has worn me out with eight weeks' cold and toothache, her average complement in the winter; and it will not go away. She is otherwise well, and reads novels all day long. She has had an exempt year, a good year; for which, forgetting the minor calamity, she and I are most thankful."

With Barton Lamb is also in a mischievous mood. Henry Fautleroy, the banker and forger, had been executed on November 30th. Barton being in a sense also a banker, Lamb wrote to him thus on December 1st: "And now, my dear Sir, trifling apart, the gloomy catastrophe of yesterday morning prompts a sadder vein. The fate of the unfortunate Fautleroy makes me, whether I will or no, to cast reflecting eyes around on such of my



friends as by a parity of situation are exposed to a similarity of temptation. My very style, seems to myself to become more impressive than usual, with the change of theme. Who that standeth, knoweth but he may yet fall? Your hands as yet, I am most willing to believe, have never deviated into others' property. You think it impossible that you could ever commit so heinous an offence. But so thought Fauntleroy once; so have thought many besides him, who at last have expiated, as he hath done. You are as yet upright. But you are a Banker, at least the next thing to it. I feel the delicacy of the subject; but cash must pass thro' your hands, sometimes to a great amount. If in an unguarded hour — but I will hope better. Consider the scandal it will bring upon those of your persuasion. Thousands would go to see a Quaker hanged, that would be indifferent to the fate of a Presbyterian, or an Anabaptist. Think of the effect it would have on the sale of your poems alone; not to mention higher considerations. I tremble, I am sure, at myself, when I think that so many poor victims of the Law at one time of their life made as sure of never being hanged as I in my presumption am too ready to do myself. What are we better than they? do we come into the world with different necks? Is there any distinctive mark under our left ears? are we unstrangulable? I ask you. Think of these things. I am shocked sometimes at the shape of my own fingers, not for their resemblance to the ape tribe (which is something) but for the exquisite adaptation of them to the purposes of picking, fingering, &c. No one that is so framed, I maintain it, but should tremble."

This was the letter—so Edward FitzGerald tells us—which Thackeray put to his forehead with the words "Saint Charles!" Why it should have so moved Thackeray to that exclamation may always have puzzled some readers. That it should have prompted him to an impulsive utterance of thankfulness for such good fooling, is natural; but why—just then—the word "saint"? The original letter (only recently printed in full) perhaps gives the key. On the other side of the paper, written painstakingly in a very minute hand (with the two lines of verse in alternate red and black inks), is this pretty passage:—

"Postscript for your Daughter's eyes only.

"Dear Miss—Your pretty little letterets make me ashamed of my great straggling coarse handwriting. I wonder where you get

pens to write so small. Sure they must be the pinions of a small wren, or a robin. If you write so in your Album, you must give us glasses to read by. I have seen a Lady's similar book all writ in following fashion. I think it pretty and fanciful.

"O how I love in early dawn  
To bend my steps o'er flowery dawn [? lawn].

Which I think has an agreeable variety to the eye. Which I recommend to your notice, with friend Elia's best wishes."

It is not much ; and yet the thought behind these few lines, and the care with which they were inscribed, are not common possessions ; so uncommon, in fact, as to belong only to very sweet-souled persons ; or, if one prefers, to saints. Thackeray, when he laid this letter to his forehead and exclaimed "Saint Charles," had full reason. Assisted by this charming little message to Bernard Barton's daughter (which must have meant so much to her), all Lamb's life passed, maybe, before him in a flash—its goodness and kindness, its disappointments and sorrows ; and, most of all, perhaps, his quickness to do little things for others. "Saint Charles" becomes very clear then.

## CHAPTER XLII

## THE RELEASE

1825

Emancipation a Possibility—Harrison Ainsworth—*The Spirit of the Age*—Hazlitt on Lamb Again—Emancipation Realised—"The Superannuated Man"—Lamb at the East India House—Fellow Clerks—John Chambers' Stories—In the Stocks at Barnet—Ogilvie's Stories—The Burdens of Leisure.

WE now come to the last important year in Lamb's life, the year of his emancipation. For some time he had been in poor health; for a longer time he had been restless and worn by the routine of office work. His position in the East India House, though not exalted, had become remunerative: in 1821 his salary had risen to £700, and just before his retirement, that is to say some time in the winter of 1824-25, it was raised to £730; but he was weary, and the dream of retiring on a pension, having once been indulged, haunted him. Fortunately the Directors of the East India House were sympathetic.

With 1825 the *London Magazine*, which had been declining not only in interest but popularity, made another attempt to recover its lost prestige; but again Taylor's want of acumen rendered the effort abortive. Such advantage as might have been gained by inspiring Lamb and others to new vigour was lost by raising the price to half a crown. Lamb's readers, however, gained by such fantasies as the "Letter to an Old Gentleman whose Education has been Neglected" (written some time earlier—a parody of De Quincey), the fine open Letter to Unitarians, and the spurious lives of Liston and Munden, in his best vein of grave nonsense. Lamb also wrote "Barbara S." at this time, the narrative, exquisitely handled, of an experience of Fanny Kelly when a child.

The first letter of any importance in 1825 is to Manning,



mentioning that Lamb has seen Sir George Tuthill, the physician and his old friend, who has done for him what may

"To all my nights and days to come  
Give solely sovran sway and masterdom"

—in other words, has communicated with the East India Company concerning Lamb's health. And to Barton on February 10th, he says, "O that I were kicked out of Leadenhall with every mark of indignity, and a competence in my fob!"

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* has these entries:—

"Jan. 2, 1825:—I had a fine walk to Lamb's. There I read to him his article on Liston: a pretended life. . . . It will be ill received, and if taken seriously by Liston cannot be defended." Lamb had a particular fondness for this piece of fiction. He told Miss Hutchinson, "Of all the lies I ever put off, I value this most."

"Jan. 6, 1825:—Took tea with Antony Robinson. Lambs had shut themselves up fearing a call from young Godwin and expressing great regret that I was by mistake not let in.

"Jan. 7, 1825:—Called on Lamb and chatted. He has written in the *New Times* an article against visitors. He means to express his feelings towards young Godwin, for it is chiefly against the children of old friends that he humorously vents his spleen. I have since read the article. It is pleasant. Not so his pretended biography of Liston." The article in question was the first of a series signed Lepus (the hare with too many friends) which were printed in the *New Times*.

"Feb. 9, 1825:—Walked to Lamb's. Mr. Dibdin Jr. there, grandson of the song-maker. Also a forward-talking young man, a Mr. Ainsworth, introduced to Mr. Lamb as a great admirer of his. He will be a pleasant man enough when the obtrusiveness of youth is worn away a little." This was William Harrison Ainsworth, the novelist, with whom Lamb had already had a slight correspondence and who had dedicated to Lamb his second book, *The Works of Cheviot Tichburne*. Ainsworth, who was then just twenty, was working at law in the Inner Temple; he shortly afterwards opened a publishing business in Bond Street, which, however, was only a brief experiment. In 1831 he began his career as a novelist, with *Rookwood*.

On February 10th, his fiftieth birthday, in writing to Barton, Lamb refers to Hazlitt's appreciation of Elia in *The Spirit*



CHARLES LAMB (AGED ABOUT 50)  
FROM THE DRAWING BY THOMAS WAGEMAN IN 1794 OR 1825





of the Age, just published: "He has laid on too many colours on my likeness, but I have had so much injustice done me in my own name, that I make a rule of accepting as much over-measure to Elia as gentlemen think proper to bestow." Hazlitt, in that interesting work, wrote charmingly of his old friend: "How notably he embalms a battered *beau*; how delightfully an amour, that was cold forty years ago, revives in his pages! With what well-disguised humour he introduces us to his relations, and how freely he serves up his friends! Certainly, some of his portraits are *fixtures*, and will do to hang up as lasting and lively emblems of human infirmity. Then there is no one who has so sure an ear for 'the chimes at midnight,' not even excepting Mr. Justice Shallow; nor could Master Silence himself take his 'cheese and pippins' with a more significant and satisfactory air. With what a gusto Mr. Lamb describes the inns and courts of law, the Temple and Gray's-Inn, as if he had been a student there for the last two hundred years, and had been as well acquainted with the person of Sir Francis Bacon as he is with his portrait or writings! It is hard to say whether St. John's Gate is connected with more intense and authentic associations in his mind, as a part of old London Wall, or as the frontispiece (time out of mind) of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. He haunts Watling Street like a gentle spirit; the avenues to the play-houses are thick with panting recollections, and Christ's-Hospital still breathes the balmy breath of infancy in his description of it! Whittington and his Cat are a fine hallucination for Mr. Lamb's historic Muse, and we believe he never heartily forgave a certain writer who took the subject of Guy Faux out of his hands. The streets of London are his fairy-land, teeming with wonder, with life and interest to his retrospective glance, as it did to the eager eye of childhood; he has contrived to weave its tritest traditions into a bright and endless romance!

"Mr. Lamb's taste in books is also fine, and it is peculiar. It is not the worse for a little *idiosyncrasy*. He does not go deep into the Scotch novels, but he is at home in Smollett and Fielding. He is little read in Junius or Gibbon, but no man can give a better account of Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, or Sir Thomas Brown's Urn-Burial, or Fuller's Worthies, or John Bunyan's Holy War. No one is more unimpressible to a specious declamation; no one relishes a recondite beauty more. His

admiration of Shakespear and Milton does not make him despise Pope; and he can read Parnell with patience, and Gay with delight. His taste in French and German literature is somewhat defective: nor has he made much progress in the science of Political Economy or other abstruse studies, though he has read vast folios of controversial divinity, merely for the sake of the intricacy of style, and to save himself the pain of thinking. . . .

“There is a primitive simplicity and self-denial about his manners; and a Quakerism in his personal appearance, which is, however, relieved by a fine Titian head, full of dumb eloquence! Mr. Lamb is a general favourite with those who know him. His character is equally singular and amiable. He is endeared to his friends not less by his foibles than his virtues; he insures their esteem by the one, and does not wound their self-love by the other. He gains ground in the opinion of others, by making no advances in his own.”

Another of Hazlitt's references to Lamb may be quoted here, partly because it is practically unknown. It occurs in a footnote to an article on Southey in his *Political Essays*, 1819, and refers also to Leigh Hunt: “This article falls somewhat short of its original destination, by our having been forced to omit two topics, the praise of Bonaparte, and the abuse of poetry. The former we leave to history: the latter we have been induced to omit from our regard to two poets of our acquaintance. We must say they have spoiled sport. One of them has tropical blood in his veins, which gives a gay, cordial, vinous spirit to his whole character. The other is a mad wag,—who ought to have lived at the Court of Horwendillus, with Yorick and Hamlet,—equally desperate in his mirth and his gaiety, who would laugh at a funeral and weep at a wedding, who talks nonsense to prevent the head-ache, who would wag his finger at a skeleton, whose jests scald like tears, who makes a joke of a great man, and a hero of a cat's paw. . . .” This may be capped by still another unfamiliar criticism of Lamb from Hazlitt's mouth. In the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1830, in an article entitled “My Recollections of William Hazlitt,” signed J. B. (but probably by Barry Cornwall), it is written: “When I first knew Charles Lamb, I ventured one evening to say something that I intended should pass for wit. ‘Ha! very well; very well, indeed!’ said he, ‘Ben Jonson

has said worse things,' (I brightened up, but he went stammering on to the end of the sentence)—and—and—and—*better!*' A pinch of snuff concluded this compliment, which put a stop to my wit for the evening. I related the thing to Hazlitt, afterwards, who laughed. 'Ay,' said he, 'you are never sure of him till he gets to the end. His jokes would be the sharpest things in the world, but that they are blunted by his good-nature. He wants malice—which is a pity.' 'But,' said I, 'his words at first seemed so——' 'Oh! as for that,' replied Hazlitt, 'his sayings are generally like women's letters; all the pith is in the postscript.'"

On February 27th Robinson has this: "Concluded the day by a call on Lamb. Manning &c. there, also Martin Burney whom I had not seen for a long time. He has brought his parliamentary Index to a close and has now to look out for a new occupation, for the law seems to offer no favourable prospect to him." On March 1st Lamb writes a note of sympathy to Miss Hutchinson on the death of her cousin, Thomas Monkhouse: "No one more than Robinson and we acknowledged the nobleness and worth of what we have lost."

An entry in the Court Minutes of the East India Company gives us the next step towards Lamb's liberty: "A letter from Mr. Charles Lamb, dated the 7th instant [February], stating that he has served as a Clerk in the Accountants' Office for a period of nearly 33 years; enclosing medical certificates of the declining state of his health; and requesting permission to retire from the service under the provisions of the Act of the 53 Geo. 3, cap. 155, being read: Ordered That the said Letter be referred to the Committee of Accounts to examine and report."

Writing to Barton on March 23rd Lamb says, "I am sick of hope deferred. The grand wheel is in agitation that is to turn up my Fortune, but round it rolls and will turn up nothing. I have a glimpse of Freedom, of becoming a Gentleman at large, but I am put off from day to day. I have offered my resignation, and it is neither accepted nor rejected. Eight weeks am I kept in this fearful suspense. Guess what an absorbing stake I feel it. I am not conscious of the existence of friends present or absent. The East India Directors alone can be that thing to me—or not. I have just learn'd that nothing will be decided this week. Why the next? Why any week? It has fretted



me into an itch of the fingers; I rub 'em against paper, and write to you, rather than not allay this Scorbuta."

The suspense was to endure only for six more days. On March 29th we find the following minute in the Company's books: "At a Court of Directors held on Tuesday 29th March 1825 . . . resolved that the resignation of Mr. Charles Lamb of the Accountant General's office, on account of certified ill health, be accepted, and it appearing that he has served the Company faithfully for 33 years, and is now in the receipt of an income of £730 per annum, he be allowed a pension of £450 . . . per annum . . . to commence from this date."

Thus, on Tuesday, March 29th, Lamb received his freedom and returned to Islington a gentleman at large.

On his way he dropped this note into Robinson's letter box—"I have left the d——d India House for ever! Give me great joy."

To Barton and Miss Hutchinson he wrote more fully, and to Wordsworth, a week after the event, he said: "I have been several times meditating a letter to you concerning the good thing which has befallen me, but the thought of poor Monkhouse came across me. He was one that I had exulted in the prospect of congratulating me. He and you were to have been the first participators, for indeed it has been ten weeks since the first motion of it.

"Here I am then after 33 years slavery, sitting in my own room at 11 o Clock this finest of all April mornings, a freed man, with £441 a year for the remainder of my life, live I as long as John Dennis, who outlived his annuity and starved at 90. £441, i.e. £450, with a deduction of £9 for a provision secured to my sister, she being survivor, the Pension guaranteed by Act Georgii Tertii, &c.<sup>1</sup>

"I came home for ever on Tuesday in last week. The incomprehensibleness of my condition overwhelm'd me. It was like passing from life into Eternity. Every year to be as long as three, i.e. to have three times as much real time, time that is my own, in it! I wandered about thinking I was happy, but

<sup>1</sup> Lamb (Mr. W. C. Hazlitt records) had contributed to the Regular Widows' Fund from its first establishment, April 1st, 1816, till his death, a sum of £203 19s. 1d., in consideration of which the directors, on March 9th, 1835, resolved to settle on his sister, Mary Lamb, an annuity for her life of £120, she having already, under her brother's will, an income of £90 a year.

feeling I was not. But that tumultuousness is passing off, and I begin to understand the nature of the gift. Holydays, even the annual month, were always uneasy joys: their conscious fugitiveness—the craving after making the most of them. Now, when all is holyday, there are no holydays. I can sit at home in rain or shine without a restless impulse for walkings. I am daily steadying, and shall soon find it as natural to me to be my own master, as it has been irksome to have had a master. Mary wakes every morning with an obscure feeling that some good has happened to us.

"Leigh Hunt and Montgomery after their releasements describe the shock of their emancipation much as I feel mine. But it hurt their frames. I eat, drink, and sleep sound as ever. I lay no anxious schemes for going hither and thither, but take things as they occur. Yesterday I excursed 20 miles, to day I write a few letters. Pleasuring was for fugitive play days, mine are fugitive only in the sense that life is fugitive. Freedom and life co-existent." To Barton Lamb said, "I would not serve another 7 years for seven hundred thousand pounds!" and to Miss Hutchinson, "I would not go back to my prison for seven years longer for £10,000 a year."

In the *Elia* essay "The Superannuated Man" Lamb describes his feelings with more particularity. I quote a passage at the close: "I have been fain to go among them once or twice since; to visit my old desk-fellows—my co-brethren of the quill—that I had left below in the state militant. Not all the kindness with which they received me could quite restore to me that pleasant familiarity, which I had heretofore enjoyed among them. We cracked some of our old jokes, but methought they went off but faintly. My old desk; the peg where I hung my hat, were appropriated to another. I knew it must be, but I could not take it kindly. D——l take me, if I did not feel some remorse—beast, if I had not,—at quitting my old compeers, the faithful partners of my toils for six and thirty years, that smoothed for me with their jokes and conundrums the ruggedness of my professional road. Had it been so rugged then after all? or was I a coward simply? Well, it is too late to repent; and I also know, that these suggestions are a common fallacy of the mind on such occasions. But my heart smote me. I had violently broken the bands betwixt us. It was at least not

courteous. I shall be some time before I get quite reconciled to the separation. Farewell, old cronies, yet not for long, for again and again I will come among ye, if I shall have your leave. Farewell Ch[ambers], dry, sarcastic, and friendly! Do[dwell], mild, slow to move, and gentlemanly! Pl[umley], officious to do, and to volunteer, good services!—and thou, thou dreary pile, fit mansion for a Gresham or a Whittington of old, stately House of Merchants; with thy labyrinthine passages, and light-excluding, pent-up offices, where candles for one half the year supplied the place of the sun's light; unhealthy contributor to my weal, stern fosterer of my living, farewell! In thee remain, and not in the obscure collection of some wandering bookseller, my 'works!' There let them rest, as I do from my labours, piled on thy massy shelves, more MSS. in folio than ever Aquinas left, and full as useful! My mantle I bequeath among ye."

Mr. William Foster, writing in *Macmillan's Magazine* for January, 1897, tells us all that there is to know of Lamb's duties at the East India House. "It must be remembered," he says, "that at the period of Lamb's service the Company was still a vast trading concern. Indigo and tea, drugs and piece-goods poured in a great stream into its warehouses, and were disposed of periodically at the auctions held in the sale-room of the India House. The accounts relating to this multifarious business passed through the department of which Lamb was a member. Hence his references to auditing warehousekeepers' accounts; to 'doing' the deposits on cotton-wool; to making out warrants; to the 'Indigo Appendix,' and to a tea-sale which he had just attended, in which the entry of notes, deposits, &c., had fallen, as usual, mostly to his share. . . . The office in which this business was transacted was on the first floor, probably, though this is uncertain, one of the rooms which looked into a dingy courtyard. There, from ten in the morning until he went to dine at his chop-house, punctually at one o'clock, and again from his return until four o'clock struck, he was to be found for eleven months out of the twelve. Probably from the nature of his work, he seems never to have attained the dignity of a separate chamber, but occupied a seat in a large room open to the public. At this desk, amidst continual interruptions, he scribbled in spare moments most of his private letters."

It is a pity beyond appraisement that Lamb did not write of



the India House clerks in the way that he wrote of those at the South-Sea House. But he was too near in point of time; and his personal relations with the House never wholly ceased, since after his superannuation he journeyed down to Leadenhall Street regularly to collect his dues. We have thus no glimpse of his companions in the compound of the Accountant's Office beyond occasional references in his letters and one or two anecdotes that have come to us from other clerks. The most communicative of these colleagues was John Chambers, with whom Lamb corresponded, although only one letter has survived.

Chambers's recollections were contributed to *Macmillan's Magazine* for February, 1879, by Mr. Algernon Black, his executor. The stories bring out Lamb's freakishness very vividly. For example on one occasion he "was observed to enter the office hastily and in an excited manner, assumed no doubt for the occasion, and to leave by an opposite door. He appeared no more that day. He stated the next morning, in explanation, that as he was passing through Leadenhall Market on his way to the Office he accidentally trod on a butcher's heel. 'I apologised,' said Lamb, 'to the butcher, but the latter retorted: "Yes, but your excuses won't cure my broken heel, and — me," said he, seizing his knife, "I'll have it out of you."' Lamb fled from the butcher, and in dread of his pursuit dared not remain for the rest of the day at the India House. This story was accepted as a humorous excuse for taking a holiday without leave.

"An unpopular head of a department came to Lamb one day and inquired, 'Pray, Mr. Lamb, what are you about?' 'Forty, next birthday,' said Lamb. 'I don't like your answer,' said his chief. 'Nor I your question,' was Lamb's reply." The story is related to Lamb's famous reply to the remark of a superior official, "I notice, Mr. Lamb, that you come very late every morning"—"Yes, but see how early I go."

Further information concerning John Chambers and the India House is given by Mr. W. C. Hazlitt in *The Lambs*: "One of the clerks occasionally kept a couple of hounds under his desk. Another who, like Chambers, rode on horseback to the office, missed his animal one day, and Lamb threw out a sly hint that Chambers knew something about the affair, so that the latter was watched, wherever he went, by two Bow Street runners, till the owner was told that his property had been seen in a stable in

the north of London; and there he duly found it, and had to pay a fortnight's bait." One remark of Lamb, handed down by Chambers, is that he thought he must be the only man in England who had never worn boots or mounted a horse.

John Chambers was the son of the Rev. Thomas Chambers, Vicar of Radway, near Edgehill, who, according to Lamb's essay "Thoughts on Presents of Game," had the sensible culinary habit of allowing a pound of Epping to every hare. He died in 1862, aged seventy-three. With his brother Charles Lamb also corresponded; but only one letter, a very high-spirited eulogy of fish, has been preserved.

Other clerks who have left memories of Lamb are Brook Pulham, who etched the caricature of *Elia* reproduced on the opposite page, and Mr. Ogilvie. Mr. Swinburne possesses an interleaved copy of *Wither* privately printed by John Mathew Gutch with notes by Lamb. On the fly-leaf of the book, which was given by Lamb to Pulham, is the record in Pulham's hand of a frolic in which Lamb and himself were involved one Sunday morning in 1809. It seems to have been at Barnet, and the upshot of it was that Lamb was placed in the stocks for brawling during divine service. Lamb's own story of the escapade was printed in the *London Magazine* in April, 1821, as the "Confessions of H. F. V. H. Delamore, Esq.":—

Let no eye look over thee, while thou shalt peruse it, reader!

Once——

these legs, with Kent in the play, though for far less ennobling considerations, did wear "cruel garters."

Yet I protest it was but for a thing of nought—a fault of youth, and warmer blood—a calendary inadvertence I may call it—or rather a temporary obliviousness of the day of the week—timing my Saturnalia amiss.—

Streets of Barnett, infamous for civil broils, ye saw my shame!—did not your Red Rose rise again to dye my burning cheek?

Mr. Ogilvie, whose reminiscences were imparted orally to the Rev. Joseph H. Twichell, and printed in *Scribner's Monthly* for March, 1876, said that for all Lamb's complaints in his letters, he rarely did what could be called a full day's work at the India House, but came late and generally talked a good deal at the desks of his friends. "When I first entered the India House and was introduced to him, he seized my hand, and exclaimed with an air, "Ah, Lord Ogleby! Welcome, Lord Ogleby!"<sup>1</sup> Glad to

<sup>1</sup> Lord Ogleby is in *The Clandestine Marriage*.



CHARLES LAMB CAGED 500

FROM THE PICTURE CARRIED OFF BY EDGAR ALLAN

*POWELL*





see you! Proud of the honor!"—and he never called me anything else, and that got to be my name among the clerks, and is yet, when I meet any of the few "that are left."

"To sport with the *names* of his fellows, indeed, appeared to have been a characteristic amusement with him. Mr. Ogilvie gave these specimens. There was a clerk named Wawd, distinguished for his stupidity, whom he hit off in this couplet:—

What Wawd knows, God knows;  
But God knows *what* Wawd knows!

"Another, named Dodwell, he celebrated in a charade, of which the first two lines ran thus:—

My first is that which infants call their Maker,  
My second is that which is best let alone—

Yet, in spite of his pleasantries of all sorts, his popularity with his fellow-clerks was unbounded. He allowed the same familiarity that he practised, and they all called him 'Charley.'

Another India House story has it that Lamb, when writing official letters to the firm of Bensusan and Co., invariably addressed them as "Sir—and Madam."

The East India House is now, like the South-Sea House, a nest of alien offices. From the block, however, which stands in Leadenhall Street, it is not difficult to reconstruct in one's mind the building as Lamb knew it. On September 1st, 1858, the functions of the Company were transferred to the Government, and the ledgers that Lamb kept for so many years—which contained, as he said, his real "Works"—are no more. But the Lamb tradition is still fostered at the new India Office in Whitehall. Quite lately his portrait, painted by Henry Meyer in 1826 (reproduced opposite page 562), was purchased to adorn its walls, and it now hangs over the fireplace in the Revenue Committee Room, bearing the simple inscription:—

Charles Lamb,  
Clerk in the India House, 1792-1825,

while a copy of Booth's *Tables of Simple Interest*, 1818, is carefully preserved, on the fly-leaf of which he wrote the following mock reviews:—

"This is a Book of great interest, but does not much engage our sympathy."—Extract from the *Edinburgh Review* for Oct., Nov. and Dec., 1818.

"This is a very interesting publication."—*Gentleman's Mag.* for July, 1819.

"The interest of this book, unlike the generality which we are doomed to peruse, rises to the end."—*British Critic* for Aug., 1820.

In the light of present knowledge we can see that Lamb would have been wiser had he not retired, but, after taking a long holiday for recuperation, returned to his office work and remained in harness to the end. As from time to time he tells his friends, his leisure became a burden to him, aggravated by his remoteness from London and by the circumstance that his sister, who was now getting to be an elderly woman (she was sixty-one at the time of his retirement), grew increasingly ill with each visitation of her malady, thus leaving him with longer and longer periods of loneliness. No one was less fitted than he to be solitary and unemployed. To be happy and well, he needed a little routine, friends after work and a city environment; whereas instead of this he had nothing to do; for weeks and weeks no company but his own thoughts; and his home either in Islington or in distant Enfield. It is no wonder that his health declined and his frailties increased. When his sister was well; when visitors found their way to his door; when Emma Isola's holidays brought her to the house; when the enthusiasm for work was upon him; Lamb was again himself. But in the nine years and a half yet to run after his emancipation, these alleviations were comparatively uncommon. Too often he was alone, lacking any fixed purpose, sick and dejected. The history of his life between 1825 and 1834 makes sad reading.

In the Popular Fallacy "That we should Rise with the Lark," written in 1826, when he had begun to know some of the burdens of leisure, he expresses very poignantly what I fear were only too frequently his thoughts. It is among his finest pieces of prose. "Therefore, while the busy part of mankind are fast huddling on their clothes, are already up and about their occupations, content to have swallowed their sleep by wholesale; we choose to linger a-bed, and digest our dreams. It is the very time to recombine the wandering images, which night in a confused mass presented; to snatch them from forgetfulness; to shape, and mould them. Some people have no good of their dreams. Like fast feeders, they gulp them too grossly, to taste them curiously. We love to chew the cud of a foregone vision: to collect the scattered rays of a brighter phantasm, or act over again, with firmer nerves, the sadder nocturnal tragedies; to drag into day-light a struggling and half-vanishing night-mare; to handle and examine the terrors, or the airy solaces. We have



too much respect for these spiritual communications, to let them go so lightly. We are not so stupid, or so careless, as that Imperial forgetter of his dreams, that we should need a seer to remind us of the form of them. They seem to us to have as much significance as our waking concerns; or rather to import us more nearly, as more nearly we approach by years to the shadowy world, whither we are hastening. We have shaken hands with the world's business; we have done with it; we have discharged ourself of it. Why should we get up? we have neither suit to solicit, nor affairs to manage.

"The drama has shut in upon us at the fourth act. We have nothing here to expect, but in a short time a sick bed, and a dismissal. We delight to anticipate death by such shadows as night affords. We are already half acquainted with ghosts. We were never much in the world. Disappointment early struck a dark veil between us and its dazzling illusions. Our spirits showed grey before our hairs. The mighty changes of the world already appear as but the vain stuff out of which dramas are composed. We have asked no more of life than what the mimic images in play-houses present us with. Even those types have waxed fainter. Our clock appears to have struck. We are SUPERANNUATED. In this dearth of mundane satisfaction, we contract politic alliances with shadows. It is good to have friends at court. The abstracted media of dreams seem no ill introduction to that spiritual presence, upon which, in no long time, we expect to be thrown. We are trying to know a little of the usages of that colony; to learn the language, and the faces we shall meet with there, that we may be the less awkward at our first coming among them. We willingly call a phantom our fellow, as knowing we shall soon be of their dark companionship. Therefore, we cherish dreams. We try to spell in them the alphabet of the invisible world; and think we know already, how it shall be with us. Those uncouth shapes, which, while we clung to flesh and blood, affrighted us, have become familiar. We feel attenuated into their meagre essences, and have given the hand of half-way approach to incorporeal being. We once thought life to be something; but it has unaccountably fallen from us before its time. Therefore we choose to dally with visions. The sun has no purposes of ours to light us to. Why should we get up?"

Lamb, wise for other persons with an almost unerring wisdom was (like many a good adviser) a poor counsellor to himself, and in addition was rarely, if ever, a free agent. He was pledged to his sister. It may have seemed to him that her interests, as much as his own health, demanded his release from the East India House; it certainly seemed to him that she was likely to be in a better state in the country than in London. Their lives were woven in one piece. Upon the tragedy of Mary Lamb depended the tragedy of Charles Lamb. It was decreed that her malady should sap his later years.

## CHAPTER XLIII

## AFTER THE RELEASE

1825 (*Continued*)

Lamb Ill—Enter William Hone—The Two Snuff-boxes—Barry Cornwall's Rhyming Epistle—Last Contribution to the *London Magazine*—An Evening with Lamb and Coleridge.

ON April 22nd, 1825, Crabb Robinson records that Lamb is more calmly cheerful than he has ever known him; and there is talk of travelling abroad. Writing to Dorothy Wordsworth at the end of May, the same friend says: "The expression of his delight has been childlike (in the good sense of that word). . . . M. L. has remained so long well that one might almost advise or rather permit a journey to them. But Lamb has no desire to travel. If he had, few things would give me so much pleasure as to accompany him. I should be proud of taking care of him.

"April 29, 1825:—I called to Lamb's, with whom I found Knowles, the author of 'Virginius,' and of 'William Tell' now coming out. A very Irishman in manners, tho' of the better kind. Seemingly a warmhearted man. No marks of talent in his conversation, but a bold decisive tone. He spoke of William Hazlitt as his friend, and this does not speak for his discretion or moral feeling."

On May 27th Lamb attended the funeral of John Lamb's widow, whose executor he was; and from that moment he seems to have begun to suffer from the reaction which was practically inevitable after what had happened during the year. On June 6th Robinson writes to Dorothy Wordsworth: "Poor Lamb is very unwell. His illness is however I trust a mere attack on his nerves arising out of what he is so little able to bear—troublesome business. The widow of his late brother is just dead and he is sole executor. The will will give him trouble. And he was



harassed during his illness by the necessity of making frequent journeys. I saw him last night and I went to him this morning. Mr. Gillman had been with him and he reports his complaint to be nervous. M. L. would be well were her brother so. Of a visit to you from them there is no chance. M. L. would not go so far for a thousand pounds, she says, and he cannot be happy away from her. Lamb does not encourage any one to offer to take a trip with him—he has a passion for solitude, he says, and hitherto he finds that his retirement from business has not brought leisure.” Lamb recovered partially from this attack, although another and more serious one was to come.

Early in July he and his sister joined the Allsops in lodgings at Enfield; meanwhile, although in poor health, he had been well enough to do a little work—a review of Hood and Reynolds’s *Odes and Addresses*, the *Elia* essay “The Convalescent,” a premature account of his recovery; and to take a friendly and helping interest in the *Every-Day Book*. This brings us to William Hone, another acquaintance, whom Lamb had previously known slightly, and to whom Colebrooke Cottage was lent while the Lambs were at Enfield.

William Hone cannot be described as a close friend of Lamb. His attitude was rather that of a disciple or dependant, but the acquaintance drew from Lamb some charming scraps of writing. Hone’s was the stormy career that belongs to ardent politicians who are on the side of a small minority. Nearly five years younger than Lamb, he was the son of a strict disciplinarian of Bath. At the age of ten he was sent to London to enter an attorney’s office; but he picked up more republicanism than law, and in 1800, having first provided himself with a wife, he commenced bookseller, and for seventeen years he carried on a small business, chequered by bankruptcy, fire and robberies. His family became numerous; he spent much of his money in philanthropic crusades, one of which was directed against ill-managed lunatic asylums, in founding newspapers, and in other pursuits intended for the service of his fellows, but leading invariably to the impoverishment of himself. In 1817 he went farther; turning his attention to politics, he wrote and issued scathing satires on the Government. Among them were *The Sinecurist’s Creed*, *The Political Litany* and *The Late John Wilkes’s Catechism*, which, with rude but very apposite cuts by George Cruikshank, whom Hone

practically discovered, took the town immensely. The form of the squibs was, however, ill chosen, and an action for blasphemy was instituted, based on the fact that the Athanasian Creed, the Litany and the Church Catechism were held up to public ridicule. The Attorney-General prosecuted, Hone defended himself, and Lord Ellenborough presided during two of the three trials, which were held on December 18th, 19th and 20th, 1817. Hone spoke altogether for twenty hours, displaying profound knowledge of English law, and superb courage. Lord Ellenborough summed up against him with impassioned feeling, but Hone was acquitted. The verdict, which was extremely popular, is said to have accelerated Ellenborough's death, which occurred in 1818. Hone became for the moment the people's darling, a public subscription of upwards of £3,000 was raised for him, and he took a new shop on Ludgate Hill and resumed his satirical labours, with a special bias against the Regent.

What Lamb thought of the trial we can only guess; his existing letters say nothing of it; but when in 1823 Hone published his *Ancient Mysteries* he sent Lamb a copy, and Lamb replied asking him to call. Thus, to the best of my knowledge, their acquaintance began. In 1825 Hone issued the first number of his *Every-Day Book*, to be followed by the *Table Book* and the *Year Book*, three collections of folk-lore, antiquarianism, topography and curious matter, upon which his fame rests and will rest for many years. Lamb helped him with advice and contributions, and to the May number of the *London Magazine* for 1825 sent a copy of verses beginning bravely,

I like you and your book, ingenuous Hone.

Hone was delighted. He copied the poem into his periodical and added a reply from his own pen which, I regret to say, rhymed "Elia" to "aspire". It contained these lines:—

I am "ingenuous:" it is all I can  
Pretend to: it is all I wish to be;  
Yet, through obliquity of sight in man,  
From constant gaze on tortuosity,  
Few people understand me: still, I am  
Warmly affection'd to each human being;  
Loving the right, for right's sake; and, friend Lamb,  
Trying to see things as they are; hence, seeing  
Some "good in ev'ry thing," however bad,  
Evil in many things that look most fair,  
And pondering on all. . . .

The first volume of the *Every-Day Book*, when issued in book form in 1826, had the following dedication:—

TO  
CHARLES LAMB, ESQ.

DEAR L—

Your letter to me within the first two months from the commencement of the present work, approving my notice of St. Chad's Well, and your afterwards daring to publish me your "friend," with your "proper name" annexed, I shall never forget. Nor can I forget your and Miss Lamb's sympathy and kindness when glooms outmastered me; and that your pen spontaneously sparkled in the book, when my mind was in clouds and darkness. These "trifles," as each of you would call them, are benefits scored upon my heart; and

I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME,  
TO YOU AND MISS LAMB,  
WITH AFFECTIONATE RESPECT,  
W. HONE.

May 5, 1826.

Scattered throughout the books are allusions to Lamb's work, informed by the warmest enthusiasm.

In 1826 Hone's affairs, in spite of the public subscription, were in so sad a state that he was consigned to the King's Bench, where he lived (within the prison rules, at Southwark,) for three years, carrying on his editorial work as before. In 1827 Lamb still assisted him—all his letters, enclosing Garrick extracts and other material for the *Table Book*, being addressed to Hone in his harbour of refuge. After quitting the King's Bench Hone again sank into difficulties, and in 1830, as we shall see, it was decided by his friends, among whom Lamb seems to have been the moving spirit, to establish the unfortunate satirist in a business of a more trustworthy character than bookselling. He was therefore placed in a coffee-house in Gracechurch Street; but without success. His remaining years were given to literary work and Evangelical religion (he was converted by Edward Irving), and he died in 1842. Dickens and Cruikshank were at his funeral.

In a letter from Hone printed in a pamphlet entitled *Some Account of the Conversion of the Late William Hone*, 1853, I find the following pleasant story: "One summer's evening I was walking on Hampstead Heath with Charles Lamb, and we had talked ourselves into a philosophic contempt of our slavery to the habit of snuff-taking, and with the firm resolution of



never again taking a single pinch, we threw our snuff boxes away from the hill on which we stood, far among the furze and brambles below, and went home in triumph; I began to be very miserable, was wretched all night; in the morning I was walking on the same hill, I saw Charles Lamb below, searching among the bushes; he looked up laughing, and saying, 'What, you are come to look for your snuff box too!' 'O no,' said I taking a pinch out of a paper in my waistcoat pocket, 'I went for a half-penny worth to the first shop that was open.'"

Writing to Southey on August 10th, from the house at Enfield which he shared with Allsop, Lamb says that he has a "one-act farce going to be acted at the Haymarket; but when? is the question"—a reference to "The Pawnbroker's Daughter," which was, however, in two acts, and was never performed—fortunately, I think, for its author's peace of mind. "Mary," Lamb says, "walks her twelve miles a day some days, and I my twenty on others."

Lamb also tells Southey the news that the *London Magazine* has fallen, changed publishers, and he will write for it no more. His last contribution was the essay "Stage Illusion" in the August number. In the previous number had been printed Procter's rhymed address "To Charles Lamb. Written over a flask of sherris":—

Dear Lamb, I drink to thee,—to *thee*  
Married to sweet Liberty!—

What!—old friend, and *art* thou freed  
From the bondage of the pen?  
Free from care and toil indeed—  
Free to wander amongst men  
When and howsoe'er thou wilt,—  
All thy drops of labour spilt  
On those huge and figured pages,  
Which will sleep unclasp'd for ages,  
Little knowing who did wield  
The quill that traversed their white field?  
Come,—another mighty health!  
Thou hast earn'd thy sum of wealth,  
Countless ease,—immortal leisure,—  
Days—and nights of boundless pleasure,  
Checquer'd by no dream of pain,  
Such as hangs on clerk-like brain  
Like a nightmare, and doth press  
The happy soul from happiness.

Oh! happy thou,—whose all of time  
 (Day, and eve, and morning-prime)  
 Is fill'd with talk on pleasant themes,—  
 Or visions quaint, which come in dreams  
 Such as panther'd Bacchus rules,  
 When his rod is on "the schools,"  
 Mixing wisdom with their wine;—  
 Or, perhaps, thy wit so fine  
 Strayeth in some elder book,  
 Whereon our modern Solons look  
 With severe ungifted eyes,  
 Wondering what thou seest to prize.  
 Happy thou, whose skill can take  
 Pleasure at each turn, and slake  
 Thy thirst by every fountain brink,  
 Where less wise men would pause to shrink,  
 Sometimes 'mid stately avenues  
 With Cowley thou or Marvel's muse  
 Dost walk,—or Gray, by Eton towers,  
 Or Pope, in Hampton's chestnut bowers,—  
 Or Walton, by his loved Lea stream:—  
 Or,—dost thou with our Milton dream  
 Of Eden, and the Apocalypse,  
 And hear the words from his great lips?

Speak!—In what grove or hazel shade  
 For "musing Meditation made,"  
 Dost wander,—or on Penshurst lawn,  
 Where Sydney's fame had time to dawn  
 And die, ere yet the hate of men  
 Could envy at his perfect pen?  
 Or, dost thou in some London street,  
 With voices fill'd and thronging feet,  
 Loiter, with mien 'twixt grave and gay—  
 Or take, along some pathway sweet,  
 Thy calm suburban way?—  
 Happy beyond that man of Ross,  
 Whom mere content could ne'er engross,  
 Art *thou*,—with hope,—health,—"learned leisure,"  
 Friends—books—thy thoughts—an endless pleasure!  
 —Yet—yet—(for when was pleasure made  
 Sunshine all without a shade?)  
 Thou, perhaps, as now thou rovest  
 Through the busy scenes thou lovest  
 With an idler's careless look,  
 Turning some moth-pierced book,  
 Feel'st a sharp and sudden woe  
 For visions vanished long ago!—  
 And then thou think'st how time has fled  
 Over thy unsilver'd head,  
 Snatching many a fellow mind  
 Away, and leaving—what—behind?—

Nought, alas ! save joy and pain  
 Mingled ever, like a strain  
 Of music where the discords vie  
 With the truer harmony.  
 So, perhaps, with thee the vein  
 Is sullied ever,—so the chain  
 Of habits and affections old,  
 Like a weight of solid gold,  
 Presseth on thy gentle breast,  
 Till sorrow rob thee of thy rest.

—Ay: So it is. Ev'n *I* (whose lot  
 The fairy Love so long forgot)  
 Seated beside this Sherris wine,  
 And near to books and shapes divine,  
 Which poets and the painters past  
 Have wrought in lines that aye shall last—  
 Ev'n I, with Shakspeare's self beside me,  
 And One, whose tender talk can guide me  
 Through fears, and pains, and troublous themes,—  
 Whose smile doth fall upon my dreams  
 Like sunshine on a stormy sea,—  
 Want *something*,—when I think of *thee*!

May 25, 1825.

Almost immediately on returning to Colebrooke Cottage from Enfield, Lamb suffered a relapse—another nervous breakdown aggravated by sleeplessness. On September 24th he tells Allsop that he is better, but that Mary Lamb has been taken ill again, her first attack since 1823. Writing to Dorothy Wordsworth on November 2nd, Crabb Robinson describes Lamb as a “distressing object,” suffering both from his own illness and anxiety for his sister. But on December 5th Lamb is able to tell Allsop that “we are at home to visitors” once more. Writing to his nephew Edward on December 9th of this year Coleridge says, “I have secured Charles Lamb and Edward Irving to meet you,” and he adds that he hopes also for Blanco White.

Meanwhile, having lost the *London Magazine*, Lamb had come to terms with Colburn, the publisher of the *New Monthly Magazine*, to which he was to contribute a series of “Popular Fallacies” and anything else that might occur to him. The Fallacies began in the number for January, 1826.

In the *Monthly Repository* for 1835 is a description, signed S. Y., of an evening spent at Colebrooke Cottage with the Lambs and Coleridge. The writer was Sarah Flower, afterwards Sarah Adams, a daughter of Benjamin Flower of the *Cambridge*



*Intelligencer*, who had published Coleridge's "Ode on the Departing Year" in 1796. The time would be the end of the year 1825. I quote some passages.<sup>1</sup> "The character of Charles Lamb's person was in total contrast to that of Coleridge. His strongly-marked, deeply-lined face, furrowed more by feeling than age, like an engraving by Blake, where every line told its separate story, or like a finely chiselled head done by some master in marble, where every touch of the chisel marked some new attribute. Yet withal there was so much sweetness and playfulness lurking about the corners of the mouth, that it gave to the face the extraordinary character of flexible granite. His figure was small even to spareness. It was as if the soul within, in its constant restless activity, had worn the body to its smallest possibility of existence.

"There was an equal amount of difference in his conversation from that of Coleridge, as there was in his person. It was not one uninterrupted flow, but a periodical production of sentences, short, telling, full of wit, philosophy, at times slightly caustic, though that is too strong a word for satire which was of the most good-natured kind. There was another essential point of difference. In Coleridge might be detected a certain consciousness of being listened to, and at times an evident getting up of phrases, a habit almost impossible to be avoided in a practised conversationalist. In Charles Lamb there was a perfect absence of this; all that he said was choice in its humour, true in its philosophy; but the racy freshness, that was like an atmosphere of country air about it, was better than all; the perfect simplicity, absence of all conceit, child-like enjoyment of his own wit, and the sweetness and benevolence that played about the rugged face, gave to it a charm in no way inferior to the poetical enjoyment derived from the more popular conversation of his friend.

"Another difference might be observed; that Coleridge's metaphysics seemed based in the study of his own individual nature more than the nature of others, while Charles Lamb seemed not for a moment to rest on self, but to throw his whole soul into the nature of circumstances and things around him. These differences served only to heighten the enjoyment of witnessing the long-enduring genuine friendship existing between

<sup>1</sup> The paper will be found in full in Mr. Dobell's *Sidelights on Charles Lamb*.

the two,—the three (for why should 'Mary' be excluded?)—wrought out of mingling sympathies and felicitous varieties. In Charles Lamb, as in Coleridge, at times there was a melancholy in the face which partook of the nature of his individual character. It was not dissatisfaction; it was not gloom: but it seemed to say that he had had more affection, more gushing tenderness of feeling, than he had met with objects on whom to expend it. . . .

"Coleridge, on the evening in question, spoke of death with fear; not from the dread of punishment, not from the shrinking from physical pain, but he said he had a horror lest, after the attempt to 'shuffle off this mortal coil,' he should yet 'be thrown back upon himself.' Charles Lamb kept silence, and looked sceptical; and, after a pause, said suddenly, 'One of the things that made me question the particular inspiration they ascribed to Jesus Christ was his ignorance of the character of Judas Iscariot. Why did not he and his disciples kick him out for a rascal, instead of receiving him as a disciple?' Coleridge smiled very quietly, and then spoke of some person (name forgotten) who had been making a comparison between himself and Wordsworth as to their religious faith. 'They said, although I was an atheist, we were upon a par, for that Wordsworth's Christianity was very like Coleridge's atheism; and Coleridge's atheism was very like Wordsworth's Christianity.'

"After some time, he moved round the room to read the different engravings that hung upon the walls. One, over the mantel-piece, especially interested his fancy. There were only two figures in the picture, both women. One was of a lofty, commanding stature, with a high intellectual brow, and of an abbess-like deportment. She was standing in grave majesty, with the finger uplifted, in the act of monition to a young girl beside her. The face was in profile, and somewhat severe in its expression; but this was relieved by the richness and grace of the draperies in which she was profusely enveloped. The girl was in the earliest and freshest spring of youth, lovely and bright, with a somewhat careless and inconsiderate air, and she seemed but half inclined to heed the sage advice of her elder companion. She held in her hand a rose, with which she was toying, and had she been alive you would have expected momentarily to see it taken between the taper fingers and scattered in wilful pro-

fusion. Coleridge uttered an expression of admiration, and then, as if talking to himself, apostrophised in some such words as these: 'There she stands, with the world all before her: to her it is as a fairy dream, a vision of unmingled joy. To her it is as is that lovely flower, which woos her by its bright hue and fragrant perfume. Poor child! must thou too be reminded of the thorns that lurk beneath? Turn thee to thy monitress! she bids thee clasp not too closely pleasures that lure but to wound thee. Look into her eloquent eyes; listen to her pleading voice; her words are words of wisdom; garner them up in thy heart; and when the evil days come, the days in which thou shalt say "I find no pleasure in them," remember her as thus she stood, and, with uppointing finger, bade thee think of the delights of heaven—that heaven which is ever ready to receive the returning wanderer to its rest.'<sup>1</sup>

"He spoke of the effect of different sounds upon his sensations; said, of all the pains the sense of hearing ever brought to him, that of the effect made by a dog belonging to some German conjurer was the greatest. The man pretended that the dog would answer, 'Ich bedanke mein herr' when anything was given to it; and the effort and contortion made by the dog to produce the required sound, proved that the scourge, or some similar punishment, had been applied to effect it. In contrast to this was the homage he rendered to the speaking voice of Mrs. Jordan, on which he expatiated in such rapturous terms, as if he had been indebted to it for a sixth sense. He said that

<sup>1</sup> I quote Coleridge's apostrophe and the description of the picture because it is an indication of how little either Coleridge or S. Y. really knew of their hostess's work. The picture was Leonardo da Vinci's "Modestia et Vanitas," on which Mary Lamb had already said, in print, all that was needful, in her "Lines Suggested by a Picture of Two Females by Leonardo Da Vinci," included in Lamb's *Works* (which was dedicated to Coleridge) in 1818:—

The lady Blanch, regardless of all her lovers' fears,  
To the Urs'line convent hastens, and long the Abbess hears.  
"O Blanch, my child, repent ye of the courtly life ye lead."  
Blanch looked on a rose-bud and little seem'd to heed.  
She looked on the rose-bud, she looked round, and thought  
On all her heart had whisper'd, and all the Nun had taught.  
"I am worshipp'd by lovers, and brightly shines my fame,  
"All Christendom resoundeth the noble Blanch's name.  
"Nor shall I quickly wither like the rose-bud from the tree,  
"My queen-like graces shining when my beauty's gone from me.  
"But when the sculptur'd marble is raised o'er my head,  
"And the matchless Blanch lies lifeless among the noble dead,  
"This saintly lady Abbess hath made me justly fear,  
"It nothing will avail me that I were worshipp'd here."



it was the exquisite witchery of her tone that suggested an idea in his 'Remorse,' that if Lucifer had had permission to retain his angel voice, hell would have been hell no longer.

"In the course of the evening the talented editor of the *Comic Annual* [Thomas Hood] made his appearance. He was then known only by his Hogarthian caricature of 'The Progress of Cant,' upon which Coleridge complimented him. After some time he introduced many of his etchings, which were then unknown to the world, and they were the means of exciting in Coleridge the first genuine hearty laugh I had seen. If one had not admired entirely, it would have been enough to have made him envied. Laugh after laugh followed as the square tablets (trump cards in the pack of the genius of caricature) were laid upon the table, and a merry game it was for all. The effect was not a little increased by the extreme quietude of their master, who stood by without uttering a word, except with the corners of his mouth, where the rich fund of humour which had furnished the treat we were enjoying, was speaking more intelligibly than any words.

"He went, and the time went, and the supper went; and at last it was time for Coleridge to go too, for he had the walk to Highgate all before him. His friend begged earnestly that he might walk with him, but without avail. There was an affectionate parting, as if they had been boys rather than men, and it seemed to concentrate their lives into that minute. It recalled the meetings and partings of other days; the wanderings by the lakes; the many minglings in social union; a whole host of recollections seemed to crowd around and enclose them in a magic circle. Coleridge lingered on the threshold, as if he were leaving what had been a part of his heart's home for many years; and again he who had been his companion in many a mountain ramble, many a stroll 'in dale, forest, and mead, by paved fountain and by rushy brook, and on the beached margent of the sea,' would fain have kept up the old companionship even though it was night, and the way had no such temptations. Another grasp of the hand, and a kiss of affection on Mary's cheek, and he was gone.

"I never saw him again; and Charles Lamb and his sister but once since; and that was a few months ago in the street. He had aged considerably, but it scarcely excited melancholy, for

Mary was with him like a good guardian angel. They had that same country air freshness about them; they looked unlike everything around; there was an elderly respectability about them; not the modern upstart prig of a word, but the genuine old china, old plate, bright, black, mahogany air, which is now almost departed. I watched them earnestly; a vague feeling that it was something I should never see again; and so it has happened."

## CHAPTER XLIV

1826

Henry Meyer's Portrait of Lamb—Brook Pulham's Caricature—Enter Edward Moxon—A Party at Leigh Hunt's—Dibdin's Sunday at Hastings—A Task at the British Museum—The Rev. John Mitford at Colebrooke Cottage—"Dash."

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SIX was a very quiet year. Lamb walked much and wrote little; Crabb Robinson's *Diary* has few entries of importance; and the correspondence is for the most part trifling. Edward Moxon seems to have been the only new friend.

Writing to Barton on March 20th Lamb mentions one of the minor disadvantages of leaving the East India House: "You may know my letters by the paper and the folding. For the former, I live on scraps obtained in charity from an old friend whose stationery is a permanent perquisite; for folding, I shall do it neatly when I learn to tye my neckcloths. I surprise most of my friends by writing to them on ruled paper, as if I had not got past pot-hooks and hangers. Sealing-wax, I have none on my establishment. Wafers of the coarsest bran supply its place. When my Epistles come to be weighed with Pliny's, however superior to the Roman in delicate irony, judicious reflexions, etc., his gilt post will bribe over the judges to him. All the time I was at the E. I. H. I never mended a pen; I now cut 'em to the stumps, marring rather than mending the primitive goose quill. I cannot bear to pay for articles I used to get for nothing. When Adam laid out his first penny upon nonpareils at some stall in Mesopotamos, I think it went hard with him, reflecting upon his old goodly orchard, where he had so many for nothing."

On May 16th, in another letter to Barton, we see Lamb in an untempered East wind: "I have had my head and ears stuff'd up with the East winds. A continual ringing in my brain of



bells jangled, or The Spheres touchd by some raw Angel. It is not George 3 trying the 100th psalm? I get my music for nothing. But the weather seems to be softening, and will thaw my stunnings. Coleridge writing to me a week or two since begins his note—‘Summer has set in with its usual Severity.’ A cold Summer is all I know of disagreeable in cold. I do not mind the utmost rigour of real Winter, but these smiling hypocrites of Mays wither me to death. My head has been a ringing Chaos, like the day the winds were made, before they submitted to the discipline of a weathercock, before the Quarters were made. In the street, with the blended noises of life about me, I hear, and my head is lightened, but in a room the hubbub comes back, and I am deaf as a Sinner. . . . I chuse a very little bit of paper, for my ear hisses when I bend down to write. I can hardly read a book, for I miss that small soft voice which the idea of articulated words raises (almost imperceptibly to you) in a silent reader. I seem too deaf to see what I read. But with a touch or two of returning Zephyr my head will melt. What Lyes you Poets tell about the May! It is the most ungenial part of the Year, cold crocuses, cold primroses, you take your blossoms in Ice—a painted Sun—

Unmeaning joy around appears,  
And Nature smiles as if she sneers.

It is ill with me when I begin to look which way the wind sits. Ten years ago I literally did not know the point from the broad end of the Vane, which it was the [? that] indicated the Quarter.”

On May 26th Robinson records that he has called on Henry Meyer, the artist, in Red Lion Square, to see Lamb’s portrait for which he was then sitting. “A strong likeness. It is to be engraved perhaps. It gives L. the air of a thinking man more like the framer of a system of philosophy than of the genial and gay effusions of Elia.” The picture, reproduced on the opposite page, is now in the possession of the India Office. Henry Meyer, who is best known as an engraver, was a nephew of Hoppner and a pupil of Bartolozzi. He was one of the foundation members (and President in 1828) of the Society of British Artists, at whose exhibition in 1826 his picture of Lamb was shown as a “Portrait of a Gentleman.”

According to the published plate, Brook Pulham completed his etched caricature of Elia in 1825; but Lamb did not send



CHARLES LAMB (AGED 51)  
FROM THE PAINTING BY HENRY MEYER  
*Reproduced by permission of the Trustees*





it to Coleridge until June 1st, 1826. He then wrote: "If I know myself, nobody more detests the display of personal vanity, which is implied in the act of sitting for one's picture, than myself. But the fact is, that the likeness which accompanies this letter was stolen from my person at one of my unguarded moments by some too partial artist, and my friends are pleased to think that he has not much flattered me. Whatever its merits may be, you, who have so great an interest in the original, will have a satisfaction in tracing the features of one that has so long esteemed you. There are times when in a friend's absence these graphic representations of him almost seem to bring back the man himself. The painter, whoever he was, seems to have taken me in one of those disengaged moments, if I may so term them, when the native character is so much more honestly displayed than can be possible in the restraints of an enforced sitting attitude. Perhaps it rather describes me as a thinking man, than a man in the act of thought. Whatever its pretensions, I know it will be dear to you, towards whom I should wish my thoughts to flow in a sort of an undress rather than in the more studied graces of diction." It was this etching, reproduced opposite page 544, which so annoyed Procter that he remonstrated in a passion with the print-seller. Possibly it was not published until 1826, in humorous rivalry with Meyer.<sup>1</sup>

On September 26th, in a letter to Wordsworth, we meet Edward Moxon for the first time: "The Bearer of this is my young friend Moxon, a young lad with a Yorkshire head, and a heart that would do honour to a more Southern county: no offence to Westmoreland. He is one of Longman's best hands, and can give you the best account of *The Trade* as 'tis now going; or stopping. For my part, the failure of a Bookseller is not the most unpalatable accident of mortality:

sad but not saddest  
The desolation of a hostile city.

When Constable fell from heaven, and we all hoped Baldwin was next, I tuned a slight stave to the words in *Macbeth* (D'avenant's) to be sung by a Chorus of Authors,

What should we do when Booksellers break?  
We should rejoice.

<sup>1</sup> In Appendix I. to the two-volume edition will be found a complete list of the portraits of Lamb and his sister, with comments by their contemporaries.

Moxon is but a tradesman in the bud yet, and retains his virgin Honesty; *Esto perpetua*, for he is a friendly serviceable fellow, and thinks nothing of lugging up a Cargo of the Newest Novels once or twice a week from the Row to Colebrooke to gratify my Sister's passion for the newest things. He is her Bodley. He is author besides of a poem which for a first attempt is promising. It is made up of common images, and yet contrives to read originally. You see the writer felt all he pours forth, and has not palmed upon you expressions which he did not believe at the time to be more his own than adoptive. Rogers has paid him some proper compliments, with sound advice intermixed, upon a slight introduction of him by me; for which I feel obliged. Moxon has petition'd me by letter (for he had not the confidence to ask it in London) to introduce him to you during his holydays; pray pat him on the head, ask him a civil question or two about his verses, and favor him with your genuine autograph. He shall not be further troublesome. I think I have not sent any one upon a gaping mission to you a good while."

Edward Moxon, who was then nearly twenty-five, was a clerk in the publishing firm of Longmans. The volume which he had written was *The Prospect and other Poems*, dedicated to Samuel Rogers. We shall soon be much in his company.

Lamb adds, in the same letter, "We are all well, and I have at last broke the bonds of business a second time, never to put 'em on again. I pitch Colburn and his magazine to the devil. I find I can live without the necessity of writing, tho' last year I fretted myself to a fever with the hauntings of being starved. Those vapours are flown. All the difference I find is that I have no pocket money: that is, I must not pry upon an old book stall, and cull its contents as heretofore, but shoulders of mutton, Whitbread's entire, and Booth's best, abound as formerly."

In July we have a glimpse of the Lambs, in a letter from Leigh Hunt to Procter: "Be it known to you then, that here is a golden opportunity for you to behave like a humane Christian, and heap coals of fire on my head—vindictive charity—unappeasable forgiveness. Charles Lamb and his sister come to drink tea with me to-morrow afternoon at five, dinner being prohibited him by that 'second conscience' of his, as he calls her. Well, to meet and be beatified with the sight of Charles Lamb, comes Mr. Atherstone, author of some poems which you have most

probably heard of; and as poets, like lovers, can never have one beatific vision but they desire another, I no sooner mention your name than he begs me for God's sake to let him have a sight of you. Pray gratify us all if you can. Hazlitt has gone to France, and is to write a life of Bonaparte."

On September 9th Lamb writes to Dibdin, then staying at Hastings for his health, a long and amusing letter, nominally to improve his spirits but mischievously depressing in tone. It must, I think, be quoted in full:—

" Postmark. September 9, 1826.

" An answer is requested.

" Saturday.

" DEAR D.—I have observed that a Letter is never more acceptable than when received upon a rainy day, especially a rainy Sunday; which moves me to send you somewhat, however short. This will find you sitting after Breakfast, which you will have prolonged as far as you can with consistency to the poor handmaid that has the reversion of the Tea Leaves; making two nibbles of your last morsel of *stale* roll (you cannot have hot new ones on the Sabbath), and reluctantly coming to an end, because when that is done, what can you do till dinner? You cannot go to the Beach, for the rain is drowning the sea, turning rank Thetis fresh, taking the brine out of Neptune's pickles, while mermaids sit upon rocks with umbrellas, their ivory combs sheathed for spoiling in the wet of waters foreign to them. You cannot go to the library, for it's shut. You are not religious enough to go to church. O it is worth while to cultivate piety to the gods, to have something to fill the heart up on a wet Sunday!

" You cannot cast accounts, for your ledger is being eaten up with moths in the Ancient Jewry. You cannot play at draughts, for there is none to play with you, and besides there is not a draught board in the house. You cannot go to market, for it closed last night. You cannot look in to the shops, their backs are shut upon you. You cannot read the Bible, for it is not good reading for the sick and the hypochondriacal. You cannot while away an hour with a friend, for you have no friend round that Wrekin. You cannot divert yourself with a stray acquaintance, for you have picked none up. You cannot bear



the chiming of Bells, for they invite you to a banquet, where you are no visitant. You cannot cheer yourself with the prospect of a tomorrow's letter, for none come on Mondays. You cannot count those endless vials on the mantlepiece with any hope of making a variation in their numbers. You have counted your spiders: your Bastile is exhausted. You sit and deliberately curse your hard exile from all familiar sights and sounds. Old Ranking poking in his head unexpectedly would just now be as good to you as Grimaldi. Any thing to deliver you from this intolerable weight of Ennui. You are too ill to shake it off: not ill enough to submit to it, and to lie down as a lamb under it.

"The Tyranny of Sickness is nothing to the Cruelty of Con-  
vallescence: 'tis to have Thirty Tyrants for one. That pattering  
rain drops on your brain. You'll be worse after dinner, for you  
must dine at one to-day, that Betty may go to afternoon service.  
She insists upon having her chopped hay. And then when she  
goes out, who *was* something to you, something to speak to—  
what an interminable afternoon you'll have to go thro'. You  
can't break yourself from your locality: you cannot say 'Tomorrow  
morning I set off for Banstead, by God:' for you are book'd for  
Wednesday. Foreseeing this, I thought a *cheerful letter* would  
come in opportunely. If any of the little topics for mirth I have  
thought upon should serve you in this utter extinguishment of  
sunshine, to make you a little merry, I shall have had my ends.  
I love to make things comfortable. [*Here is an erasure.*] This,  
which is scratch'd out was the most material thing I had to say,  
but on maturer thoughts I defer it.

"P.S.—We are just sitting down to dinner with a pleasant  
party, Coleridge, Reynolds the dramatist, and Sam Bloxam:  
tomorrow (that is, *today*), Liston, and Wyat of the Wells, dine  
with us. May this find you as jolly and freakish as we mean to be.

"C. LAMB."

The postscript may have been an invention; or it may have  
been wholly or partially true. Reynolds would be Frederick Rey-  
nolds, author of very many plays, among them one called "The  
Dramatist"; Bloxam was an old Christ's Hospital acquaintance  
whose son Lamb had recommended for Eton; "Wyat of the  
Wells" (Sadler's Wells) has a jovial Thespian sound.

In the next letter—to Barton, on September 26th—Lamb ex-

plains how some of his time is being spent. "I am sorry you and yours have any plagues about dross matters. I have been sadly puzzled at the defalcation of more than one third of my income, out of which when entire I saved nothing. But cropping off wine, old books, &c. and in short all that can be call'd pocket money, I hope to be able to go on at the Cottage." It is interesting to note that Lamb saved nothing from his full income. The circumstance that at his death eight years later he left as much as £2,000 is due, I suppose, to the fact that, as he told Southey in his letter printed on page 113, his life was insured.

The letter contains also news of Lamb's project for filling his time to some purpose: "I am going thro' a course of reading at the Museum: the Garrick plays, out of part of which I formed my Specimens: I have Two Thousand to go thro'; and in a few weeks have despatch'd the tythe of 'em. It is a sort of Office to me; hours, 10 to 4, the same. It does me good. Man must have regular occupation, that has been used to it." The extracts from the old plays were intended for Hone's *Table Book* in 1827.

The letter is concerned also with the matter of some jars which Lamb was obtaining through an East India House acquaintance and official, for Barton's neighbour, the Rev. John Mitford, Rector of Benhall, editor of old poets, and later of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and cousin of the author of *Our Village*. Lamb describes him as "a pleasant layman spoiled." An account of a visit to Colebrooke Cottage, at about this time, concludes the review of Talfourd's *Letters of Charles Lamb* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for May and June, 1838, beyond doubt from Mitford's pen:—

"We have little or nothing that we can add of personal recollection, to what Mr. Talfourd has related of this somewhat eccentric, but most excellent person; but what we do know bears witness to the fidelity of the portrait which his accomplished biographer has drawn. The last time we saw Lamb, was at his residence of Colebrook Cottage in Islington; and, though we joined his society when the sun was hardly westering in his course, we did not leave it to return home till the morning star was fast descending, and the 'grey dawn' was creeping over the dewy fields and airy heights of Pentonville. There was no one but his sister with us.

“Lamb was in good spirits, talked of his different friends,—of Coleridge’s vast reading,—of Wordsworth,—of Southey, (whose hair, he triumphed to say, was grey, while his own retained its raven lustre)—spoke highly of Keats, and Barry Cornwall. In old poetry, Chapman’s Homer detained us long; and Lamb was delighted to be informed, which he was for the first time, that there are two or three distinct translations of the old bard by this same venerable admirer. We offered to lend him one of the earlier translations. ‘No, no,’ he said, ‘I know you wont like the *gap* it will leave in your library.’ He liked Ambrose Phillips’s delicate little verses. We talked of Milton’s Samson Agonistes, when Miss Lamb’s memory beat us both at a long distance. In prose, he appeared to know more or less of most of our great authors of Elizabeth and James’s time. Fuller, Burton, Sir T. Browne, Feltham, were his favourites; and he was very fond of picking up the little duodecimo volumes of Evelyn; he mentioned his book on ‘Sallets’ with delight. We forget whether we touched on Tom Coryat and the ‘Water Poet,’ but remember Randolph was not overlooked. Being asked how he knew his own books, one from the other, (the choice gleanings of many a studious walk at the book stalls in Barbican,) for scarcely any were lettered, and all were to a bibliophilist but a stray set of foundlings; ‘How does a shepherd know his sheep?’ was the answer.

“At our departure he warned us of the neighbourhood of the New River (only a few feet apart from his door) and the fate of poor George Dyer. We called a few mornings after; Lamb was out, and we sate chatting with Miss Lamb for an hour. Miss Mitford had but just left, who came to consult them on some dramatic reading for a new play. Lamb was then reading the old dramatists at the Museum, and making extracts. His sister expressed her delight in his new employment, as occupying his time, and keeping him from his walks, which she seemed to think *over long*. Little did we think, that we were never again to enjoy the society of this truly amiable, simple, excellent, and most highly gifted pair. During the evening repast, Lamb sprinkled pretty copiously his puns on albums and other similar evils over the surface of the conversation.”

Here it is time to introduce another member of the Enfield family—Dash. Patmore is Dash’s best historian. “During the early part of my acquaintance with Lamb, [he writes] when he



lived at Colebrook Row, he had, *staying on a visit with him*, a large and very handsome dog, of a rather curious breed, belonging to Mr. Thomas Hood. The Lambs (albeit spinster and bachelor) were not addicted to 'dumb creatures;' but this dog was an especial pet—(probably in virtue of his owner, who was a great favourite with them)—and he always accompanied Lamb on his long rambling daily walks in the vicinity of that part of the metropolis. But what I wish to point out to the reader's attention is, that during these interminable rambles,—heretofore pleasant in virtue of their profound loneliness and freedom as respected all companionship and restraint,—Lamb made himself a perfect slave to this dog—whose habits were of the most extravagantly errant nature, for, generally speaking, the creature was half-a-mile off from his companion, either before or behind, scouring the fields or roads in all directions, scampering up or down 'all manners of streets,' and keeping Lamb in a perfect fever of irritation and annoyance; for he was afraid of losing the dog when it was out of sight, and yet could not persuade himself to keep it *in sight* for a moment by curbing its roving spirit.

"Dash (that was his name) knew Lamb's weakness on these particulars as well as he did himself, and took a due dog-like advantage of it. In the Regent's Park in particular, Dash had his master completely at his mercy; for the moment they got into the ring, he used to get through the pailing on to the green-sward, and disappear for a quarter or half an hour together,—knowing perfectly well that Lamb did not dare to move from the spot where he (Dash) had disappeared, till such time as he thought proper to show himself again. And they used to take this particular walk much oftener than they otherwise would, precisely because Dash liked it and Lamb did not.

"I had often admired this dog; but was not a little astonished one day when Lamb and his sister came to dine with us at North End, (near Fulham) where we then lived, and brought Dash with them all the way on foot from Islington! The undertaking of the pig-driver that Leigh Hunt tells of so capitally in the *Companion*, must have been nothing to this of the dear couple, in conducting Dash through London streets. It appeared, however, that they had not brought him out this time purely for his own *delassement*, but to ask me if I would have him, 'if it were only

out of charity,' Miss Lamb said half in joke, half in earnest; 'for if they kept him much longer he would be the death of Charles!'

"I readily took charge of Dash (to be restored to his original master, Hood, in case of ill-behaviour and loss of favour); and I soon found, as I expected, that his wild and wilful ways were a pure imposition upon the easy temper of Lamb, and that as soon as he found himself in the hands of one who knew what dog-decorum was, he subsided into the best bred and best behaved of his species."

Dash would be Lamb's second or third dog, for we have Manning's evidence that there was a predecessor in the barking Prynne (so called, I imagine, from having, like the author of *Histrion-Mastix*, cropped ears); while in the letter to Miss Humphreys, in 1821, Lamb refers to one Pompey. But Pompey may also have been Prynne. Patmore prints a letter from Lamb, belonging probably to early June, 1827, asking news of Dash: "Excuse my anxiety—but how is Dash?—(I should have asked if Mrs. Patmore kept her rules, and was improving—but Dash came uppermost. The order of our thoughts should be the order of our writing.) Goes he muzzled, or *aperto ore*? Are his intellects sound, or does he wander a little in *his* conversation? You cannot be too careful to watch the first symptoms of incoherence. The first illogical snarl he makes, to St. Luke's with him! All the dogs here are going mad, if you believe the overseers; but I protest they seem to be very rational and collected. But nothing is so deceitful as mad people to those who are not used to them. Try him with hot water. If he won't lick it up, it is a sign he does not like it. Does his tail wag horizontally or perpendicularly? That has decided the fate of many dogs in Enfield. Is his general deportment cheerful? I mean when he is pleased—for otherwise there is no judging. You can't be too careful. Has he bit any of the children yet? If he has, have them shot, and keep *him* for curiosity, to see if it was the hydrophobia." One of these children, by the way, was the poet Coventry Patmore, then four years old.

## CHAPTER XLV

1827

The Death of Randal Norris—Mrs. Coe's Reminiscences—Lamb Among Children—Lamb's Good Things—Angling—"On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born"—Mary Lamb by Thomas Hood—*The Plea of the Midsummer-Fairies*—A Few Jokes—An Evening at the Hoods—Nonsense to Patmore—Emma Isola's Latinity—The Clarkson Memorial—"In My Own Album"—The Removal to Enfield—Mary Lamb Ill Again—Enter Thomas Westwood—Lamb and Walton—Robinson at Enfield.

IT was in January, 1827, that a link between Charles and Mary Lamb and their childhood was broken, by the death of their and their parents' friend Randal Norris, whom we met in Chapter XVII. In his letter to Crabb Robinson (afterwards included in the *Last Essays of Elia*, 1833, as "A Death-Bed") from which I quote in that chapter, Lamb writes: "To the last he called me Charley. I have none to call me Charley now."

Before Randal Norris's death his daughters had established a school at Widford; and after his death Mrs. Norris and Richard joined them there, and there they lived to the end. We have at once further glimpses of the Norris family and more light on Lamb's quaint way with children, in the reminiscences of Mrs. Elizabeth Coe, once a pupil of the Misses Norris, who died as recently as 1903, and with whom, a year earlier, the late W. J. Craig (who was an editor of both Lamb and Shakespeare) and I had an interesting conversation, the substance of which was printed in the *Athenæum* for June 7th, 1902. Mrs. Coe (formerly Elizabeth Hunt, of Widford), who was then in her eighty-fourth year, remembered Lamb as he was between 1827 and 1832. In those years he used often to walk down to Widford—twenty-two miles from London—to spend a day or two among old friends and older associations. These little visits probably signified that Mary Lamb was ill, for Mrs. Coe did not remember that Mary Lamb ever accompanied her brother. At any rate, she never saw her. Miss Isola, she said, came with him once, and her feet



were so sore from the journey that she had to lie in bed for two or three days, Mr. Lamb waiting for her recovery. Mr. Lamb often had blisters too, but he did not seem to mind. He loved walking too much.

His chief friends at Widford in those days were the Norrises. They lived at Goddard House, the school being known as Goddard House School. The sisters were always called Miss Betsy and Miss Jane. Mrs. Norris on moving to Widford in 1827 quickly took her place as the good angel of her old village : doctor, nurse, and every one's refuge in trouble. No sooner did the rumour of sickness waft in, than, I gather, Goddard House projected beef tea and jellies into the afflicted home. Mrs. Coe says that Mr. Richard Norris, who was deaf and peculiar, lived in the house too.

Among the pupils at Goddard House was Elizabeth Hunt, one of the three little daughters of Thomas Hunt, of the Widford water mill, whose wife and Mrs. Norris were old friends. Lizzie Hunt afterwards became Mrs. Coe. In those days—seventy and more years ago—she was Mr. Lamb's favourite among all the Widford children, partly, she fancied, from her quickness in catching a mischievous idea. She remembered, with a vividness that was, to some extent, communicable, his affected conviction that her hair curled only by artificial means, and his repeated warnings at bedtime that she must on no account forget to put in her papers. "But I don't have to curl it, Mr. Lamb, I don't, I don't." "Well, bring me a mug of beer from old Bogey and we'll say no more about it." Old Bogey was the big cask.

As a rule, when Mr. Lamb walked down to see the Norrises, he used to sleep at the mill. "Now, Mrs. Hunt," he would say, "are you going to let me creep into a goose's belly to-night?" for he always had his joke, and no one would expect him to call a feather bed a feather bed, like other folks. He said it was like heaven, in a goose's belly. When he made a joke he did not laugh himself.

He always brought a book with him, sometimes several, and he would read or write a great deal. His clothes were rusty and shabby, like a poor Dissenting minister's. He was very thin and looked half-starved : partly the effect of high cheek-bones. He wore knee-breeches and gaiters and a high stock. He carried a walking stick with which he used to strike at pebbles. He

smoked a black clay pipe. No one would have taken him for what he was, but he was clearly a man apart. He took pleasure in looking eccentric. He was proud of being *the* Mr. Lamb. (The testimony as to the pipe is interesting because Talfourd says that Lamb's later years were "guiltless of tobacco." Lamb himself says, however, in his whimsical autobiographical sketch, written in 1827, that though an extinct volcano he still emitted occasional puffs. I prefer to believe Mrs. Coe rather than Talfourd on this point.)

Mrs. Coe did not remember anything about Mr. Lamb's taste in food, except that he was fond of turnips. He used to come down to breakfast late. She heard, she believed from his own lips, the story of the turnip crop and the boiled legs of mutton, which will be found on page 621. Lamb must have said more good things that fell on the wrong ears and were never understood, remembered or reported, than any one in literature; but now and then he repeated them himself to a fitting audience, and we have proof in the letters that this agreeable pleasantry in the stage-coach was as attractive to him as any. There could indeed hardly be a better story than this to support the jester's right to enjoy his own joke which Lamb asserted in the *Popular Fallacies*. While on this subject I might quote Procter, in some memories of Lamb contributed to the *Athenæum* for January 24th, 1835: "It is unfortunate that most of his brilliant things—all such as are not preserved in his essays or in his unpublished letters (a mine to be worked)—are lost. In general, when a man casts forth a clever thought, you may, should you forget it, be sure to hear of it in another place. It will be in Bacon or Hobbes, in Hume or Rousseau, or the philosopher of Ferney. But if Lamb said a good thing, and it was lost, it was lost for ever; for all that he said was sincerely and emphatically his own. It is possible, indeed, that here and there one of his vagrant thoughts may still be working its way up in some hearer's mind; producing, if the soil be good, a delicate exotic flower. It may be admired and prized (by common eyes) more than the original would have been; but it will be no more *like* the original, than the polyanthus which 'the garden grows,' is to the primrose—the 'virgin primrose'—the 'pale primrose'—of the April fields."

Mr. Lamb was very free, said Mrs. Coe, with his money. To beggars he always gave; just what his hand happened to draw

from his pocket, even as much as three shillings. "Poor devil! he wants it more than I do; and I've got plenty," she had heard him say. He would take the children into the village to the little general shop. It had a door cut in two, like a butcher's, and he would lean over the lower half and rap his stick on the floor, calling loudly, "Abigail Ives! Abigail Ives!" "Ah, Mr. Lamb," she used to reply from the inner room, "I thought I knew your rap." "Yes, Abigail, it is I, and I've brought my money with me. Give these young ladies sixpennyworth of Gibraltar rock." Gibraltar rock was Abigail Ives's speciality, and sixpennyworth was an unheard-of amount except when Mr. Lamb was in the village. It had to be broken with a hammer. Mrs. Cowden Clarke gives us another glimpse of Lamb's humorous way of shopping—at Enfield—and the jocular terms on which he met old ladies behind the counter. I imagine that it would have been a very dark day indeed with him when he had no odd yet cordial greeting for his neighbours, particularly his poorer ones; and I doubt if the perplexity that so often must have accompanied the reception of his remarks by men and women of intellect was ever felt by those of humbler capacity. I suspect that he shot over the heads only of the self-satisfied.

When Mr. Lamb joined the Norrises' dinner-table, said Mrs. Coe, he kept every one laughing. Mr. Richard sat at one end, and some of the school children would be there too. One day Mr. Lamb gave every one a fancy name all round the table, and made a verse on each. "You are so-and-so," he said, "and you are so-and-so," adding the rhyme. "What's he saying? What are you laughing at?" Mr. Richard asked testily, for he was short-tempered. Miss Betsy explained the joke to him, and Mr. Lamb, coming to his turn, said—only he said it in verse—"Now, Dick, it's your turn. I shall call you Gruborum; because all you think of is your food and your stomach." Mr. Richard pushed back his chair in a rage and stamped out of the room. "Now I've done it," said Mr. Lamb: "I must go and make friends with my old chum. Give me a large plate of pudding to take to him." When he came back he said, "It's all right. I thought the pudding would do it." Mr. Lamb and Mr. Richard never got on very well, and Mr. Richard did not like his teasing ways at all; but Mr. Lamb often went for long walks with him, because no one else would. He did many kind things like that.



There used to be a half-holiday at Goddard House when Mr. Lamb came, partly because he would force his way into the schoolroom and make seriousness impossible. His head would suddenly appear at the door in the midst of lessons, with "Well, Betsy! How do, Jane?" "O, Mr. Lamb!" they would say, and that was the end of work for that day. He was really rather naughty with the children: one of his tricks was to teach them a new version of the church catechism (Mrs. Coe did not remember it, but we may rest assured, I fear, that it was secular), and he made a great fuss with Lizzie Hunt for her skill in saying the Lord's Prayer backwards, which he had taught her.

Mr. Lamb had a favourite seat in a tree in the Wilderness at Blakesware, where he would sit and read for hours. Just before meal times Mrs. Hunt would send the children to tell him to come; but sometimes he preferred to stay there and eat some bread and cheese. He always was particular to return a message either way. "Give your mother my love and kisses, and say I'll come directly." Or "Give your mother my love and kisses, and say I'll eat her beautiful luncheon here." Adding, "Don't forget the kisses, whatever you do." At other times he would watch the trout in the stream, and perhaps feed them, for half the morning. Once or twice he took a rod, but he could never bring himself to fix the worms. "Barbarous," he used to say, "barbarous." (Thomas Westwood, in the preface to his *Chronicle of the Compleat Angler*, corroborates this attitude; while in a letter to Southey, in 1799, Lamb calls anglers "those patient tyrants, meek inflictors of pangs intolerable, cool devils.")

Goddard House School ceased to be when Mrs. Norris's brother Mr. Faint died and left the family comfortably off again. Miss Betsy and Miss Jane, said Mrs. Coe, set up their own horses, and soon after each married a Mr. Tween, brothers and farmers. It was Mr. Charles Tween who told Mr. W. C. Hazlitt that Mr. Lamb had so small and "immaterial" a figure that when out walking with him he used to put his hands under his arms and lift him over a stile as if he were nothing. Both sisters survived until quite recently, Mrs. Arthur Tween dying at Widford in 1891 and Mrs. Charles Tween at Hertford in 1894. They preserved with proper piety relics of Charles Lamb. These treasures, however, have since been dispersed, the present generation lacking interest in the family's old friend.

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* has these entries on the subject of Randal Norris:—

"Jan. 27, 1827:—After tea [after Anthony Robinson's funeral] I went up to Charles Lamb. I found that he too was fully engaged by a similar occurrence of a like nature—old Norris of the Temple. He wanted me to assist in forwarding a petition from the widow to the Benchers. I met with M. Burney there.

"Jan. 28:—Then I went to Lamb. Dined with him. M. Burney there. We were chiefly occupied talking of a petition to be presented to the middle Temple Benchers for Mrs. Norris." Robinson's effort was successful and Mrs. Norris received an annual grant.

On February 1st, 1827, Robinson has this entry: "I went to Lamb. Found him in trouble about his friend Allsop, who is a ruined man." Allsop says in his book on Coleridge: "Charles Lamb, Charles and Mary Lamb, 'union in partition,' were never wanting in the hour of need: and I have a clear recollection of Miss Lamb's addressing me in a tone acting at once as a solace and support, and after as a stimulus, to which I owe more perhaps, than to the more extended *arguments* of all others."

Lamb of late had written little verse, but in the spring of 1827 an event occurred which inspired one of the most beautiful and characteristic of all his poems. In May Mrs. Hood (born Jane Reynolds, the sister of John Hamilton Reynolds) gave birth to a child, who survived only a few minutes. The note of sympathy which Lamb wrote to the father perfectly illustrates his freakish sprite, at once so human and so humorous.

"DEAREST HOOD,—Your news has spoil'd us a merry meeting. Miss Kelly and we were coming, but your letter elicited a flood of tears from Mary, and I saw she was not fit for a party. God bless you and the mother (or should be mother) of your sweet girl that should have been. I have won sexpence of Moxon by the *sex* of the dear gone one.

"Yours most truly and hers,

"C. L."

Afterwards, at Mrs. Hood's wish, he wrote his exquisite lines "On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born," notable for a blend of grave and delicate thought and fancy, and an Elizabethan quaintness, that could have come at that date from Lamb alone.

ON  
AN INFANT DYING AS SOON AS BORN

I saw where in the shroud did lurk  
 A curious frame of Nature's work.  
 A flow'ret crushed in the bud,  
 A nameless piece of Babyhood,  
 Was in a cradle-coffin lying;  
 Extinct, with scarce the sense of dying;  
 So soon to exchange the imprisoning womb  
 For darker closets of the tomb!  
 She did but ope an eye, and put  
 A clear beam forth, then strait up shut  
 For the long dark: ne'er more to see  
 Through glasses of mortality.  
 Riddle of destiny, who can show  
 What thy short visit meant, or know  
 What thy errand here below?  
 Shall we say, that Nature blind  
 Check'd her hand, and changed her mind,  
 Just when she had exactly wrought  
 A finish'd pattern without fault?  
 Could she flag, or could she tire,  
 Or lack'd she the Promethean fire  
 (With her nine moons' long workings sicken'd)  
 That should thy little limbs have quicken'd?  
 Limbs so firm, they seem'd to assure  
 Life of health, and days mature:  
 Woman's self in miniature!  
 Limbs so fair, they might supply  
 (Themselves now but cold imagery)  
 The sculptor to make Beauty by.  
 Or did the stern-eyed Fate descry,  
 That babe, or mother, one must die;  
 So in mercy left the stock,  
 And cut the branch; to save the shock  
 Of young years widow'd; and the pain,  
 When Single State comes back again  
 To the lone man who, 'reft of wife,  
 Thenceforward drags a maimed life?  
 The economy of Heaven is dark;  
 And wisest clerks have miss'd the mark,  
 Why Human Buds, like this, should fall,  
 More brief than fly ephemeral,  
 That has his day; while shrivel'd crones  
 Stiffen with age to stocks and stones;  
 And crabbed use the conscience sears  
 In sinners of an hundred years.  
 Mother's prattle, mother's kiss,  
 Baby fond, thou ne'er wilt miss.  
 Rites, which custom does impose,



Silver bells and baby clothes ;  
 Coral redder than those lips,  
 Which pale death did late eclipse ;  
 Music framed for infant's glee,  
 Whistle never tuned for thee ;  
 Though thou want'st not, thou shalt have them,  
 Loving hearts were they which gave them.  
 Let not one be missing ; nurse,  
 See them laid upon the hearse  
 Of infant slain by doom perverse.  
 Why should kings and nobles have  
 Pictured trophies to their grave ;  
 And we, churls, to thee deny  
 Thy pretty toys with thee to lie,  
 A more harmless vanity ?



Hood's Drawing of Mary Lamb.

In the summer of 1827 the Lambs visited Enfield again, lodging again at Mrs. Leishman's on Chase Side, but without the Allsops ; and there they seem to have seen much of the Hoods. In July Hood made a caricature of Mary Lamb getting over a stile, which Lamb sent to Hone for the *Table Book*, with a note : "This is Hood's, done from the life, of Mary getting over a style here. Mary, out of a pleasant revenge, wants you to get it *engrav'd* in *Table Book* to surprise H.,

who I know will be amus'd with you so doing. Append some observations about the awkwardness of country styles about Edmonton, and the difficulty of elderly Ladies getting over 'em. —That is to say, if you think the sketch good enough." The engraving was made and inserted in the *Table Book* as a portrait of John Gilpin's wife, with some comments by Lamb.

Hood's poem, *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*, was published in 1827 with a dedication to Lamb, beginning thus:—

TO CHARLES LAMB

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I thank my literary fortune that I am not reduced, like many better wits, to barter dedications, for the hope or promise of patronage, with some nominally great man; but that where true affection points, and honest respect, I am free to gratify my head and heart by a sincere inscription. An intimacy and dearness, worthy of a much earlier date than our acquaintance can refer to, direct me at once to your name: and with this acknowledgment of your ever kind feeling towards me, I desire to record a respect and admiration for you as a writer, which no one acquainted with our literature, save Elia himself, will think disproportionate or misplaced. If I had not these better reasons to govern me, I should be guided to the same selection by your intense yet critical relish for the works of our great Dramatist, and for that favourite play in particular which has furnished the subject of my verses. . . .

Lamb acknowledged the compliment by very prettily paraphrasing in the *Table Book* a portion of Hood's story under the title "The Defeat of Time."

Here, although possibly they refer to a slightly later period, I may print some further recollections of Lamb by Hood. "From Colebrooke, Lamb removed to Enfield Chase,—a painful operation at all times, for as he feelingly misapplied Wordsworth, 'the *moving* accident was not his trade.' As soon as he was settled, I called upon him, and found him in a bald-looking yellowish house, with a bit of a garden, and a wasp's nest convenient, as the Irish say, for one stung my pony as he stood at the door. Lamb laughed at the fun; but, as the clown says, the whirligig of time brought round its revenges. He was one day bantering my wife on her dread of wasps, when all at once he uttered a horrible shout,—a wounded specimen of the species had slily crawled up the leg of the table, and stung him in the thumb. I told him it was a refutation well put in, like Smollett's timely snowball. 'Yes,' said he, 'and a stinging commentary on Macbeth—

"By the pricking of my thumbs,  
Something wicked this way comes."

Hood gives two or three specimens of Lamb's jokes. "Being requested," he says, "by a young Schoolmaster to take charge of his flock for a day, 'during the unavoidable absence of the Principal,' he willingly undertook the charge, but made no other use of his 'brief authority' than to give the boys a whole holiday. . . ."

"Talking of Poetry, Lamb told me one day that he had just met with the most vigorous line he had ever read. 'Where?' 'Out of the Camden's Head, all in one line—"

'To One Hundred Pots of Porter - - £1 1 8.'

"'Scott,' says Cunningham, 'was a stout walker.' Lamb was a *porter* one. He calculated Distances, not by Long Measure, but by Ale and Beer Measure. 'Now I have walked a pint.' Many a time I have accompanied him in these matches against Meux, not without sharing in the stake." Hood's words remind me that to a pleasant paper on Enfield by Cowden Clarke in the *Tatler* of October 11th, 1830, is appended the mischievous postscript: "I omitted to mention, that our friend L \* \* \* should be apprised of the shutting up of two London porter houses (Barclay and Perkins's) since his quitting the neighbourhood of E——." <sup>1</sup>

Before leaving the Hoods I should like to quote the interesting and probably very typical picture of the Lambs in company which is given by Mrs. Balmanno, an American friend of the Cowden Clarkes, in her *Pen and Pencil*, 1858, describing an evening at the Hoods: "Miss Lamb, although many years older than her brother, by no means looked so, but presented the pleasant appearance of a mild, rather stout, and comely maiden lady of middle age. Dressed with quaker-like simplicity in dove-coloured silk, with a transparent kerchief of snow-white muslin folded across her bosom, she at once prepossessed the beholder in her favour, by an aspect of serenity and peace. Her manners were very quiet and gentle, and her voice low. She smiled frequently, but seldom laughed, partaking of the courtesies and hospitalities of her merry host and hostess with all the cheerfulness and grace of a most mild and kindly nature.

"Her behaviour to her brother was like that of an admiring disciple; her eyes seldom absent from his face. Even when

<sup>1</sup> Lamb having, in 1830 (see Chapter XLVIII.), settled again in London for a few months.



apparently engrossed in conversation with others, she would, by supplying some word for which he was at a loss, even when talking in a distant part of the room, show how closely her mind waited upon his. Mr. Lamb was in high spirits, sauntering about the room, with his hands crossed behind his back, conversing by fits and starts with those most familiarly known to him, but evidently mentally acknowledging Miss Kelly to be the *rara avis* of his thoughts, by the great attention he paid to every word she uttered. Truly pleasant it must have been to her, even though accustomed to see people listen breathless with admiration while she spoke, to find her words have so much charm for such a man as Charles Lamb.

“He appeared to enjoy himself greatly, much to the gratification of Mrs. Hood, who often interchanged happy glances with Miss Lamb, who nodded approvingly. He spoke much—with emphasis and hurry of words, sorely impeded by the stammering utterance which in him was not unattractive. Miss Kelly (charming, natural Miss Kelly, who has drawn from her audiences more heart-felt tears and smiles than perhaps any other English actress), with quiet good humour listened and laughed at the witty sallies of her host and his gifted friend, seeming as little an actress as it is possible to conceive. Once however, when some allusion was made to a comic scene in a new play then just brought out, wherein she had performed to the life the character of a low-bred lady’s maid passing herself off as her mistress, Miss Kelly arose, and with a kind of resistless ardour repeated a few sentences so inimitably, that everybody laughed as much as if the real lady’s maid, and not the actress, had been before them; while she who had so well personated the part, quietly resumed her seat without the least sign of merriment, as grave as possible. Most striking had been the transition from the calm lady-like person, to the gay, loquacious soubrette; and not less so, the sudden extinction of vivacity, and resumption of well-bred decorum. This little scene for a few moments charmed everybody out of themselves, and gave a new impetus to conversation. . . .

“Mr. Lamb oddly walked all round the table, looking closely at any dish that struck his fancy before he would decide where to sit, telling Mrs. Hood that he should by that means know how to select some dish that was difficult to carve, and take the trouble off her hands; accordingly having jested in this manner,

he placed himself with great deliberation before a lobster-salad, observing *that* was the thing. On her asking him to take some roast fowl he assented. 'What part shall I help you to, Mr. Lamb?' 'Back,' said he quickly; 'I always prefer back.' My husband laid down his knife and fork, and looking upwards exclaimed: 'By heavens! I could not have believed it, if anybody else had sworn it.' 'Believed what?' said kind Mrs. Hood, anxiously, colouring to the temples, and fancying there was something amiss in the piece he had been helped to. 'Believe what? why madam, that Charles Lamb was a back-biter!' Hood gave one of his short quick laughs, gone almost ere it had come, whilst Lamb went off into a loud fit of mirth, exclaiming: 'Now that's devilish good! I'll sup with you to-morrow night.' This eccentric flight made everybody very merry, and amidst a most amusing mixture of wit and humour, sense and nonsense, we feasted merrily, amidst jocose health-drinking, sentiments, speeches and songs.

"Mr. Hood with inexpressible gravity in the upper part of his face and his mouth twitching with smiles, sang his own comic song 'If you go to France be sure you learn the lingo;' his pensive manner and feeble voice making it doubly ludicrous. Mr. Lamb, on being pressed to sing, excused himself in his own peculiar manner, but offered to pronounce a Latin eulogium instead. This was accepted, and he accordingly stammered forth a long string of Latin words; among which, as the name of Mrs. Hood frequently occurred, we ladies thought it was in praise of her. The delivery of this speech occupied about five minutes. On enquiring of a gentleman who sat next me whether Mr. Lamb was praising Mrs. Hood, he informed me that it was by no means the case, the eulogium being on the lobster-salad!"

To resume the chronicle of the year, on July 19th Lamb sent Patmore, who was then in France, and who moved him to some of his wildest nonsense, the following letter. I quote from *My Friends and Acquaintances*, but the transcript there may be very inaccurate:—

"DEAR P.—I am so poorly! I have been to a funeral, where I made a pun, to the consternation of the rest of the mourners. And we had wine. I can't describe to you the howl which the widow set up at proper intervals. Dash could, for it was not unlike what he makes.

“The letter I sent you was one directed to the care of E. White, India House, for Mrs. Hazlitt. *Which* Mrs. Hazlitt I don’t yet know, but A. has taken it to France on speculation. Really it is embarrassing. There is Mrs. present H., Mrs. late H., and Mrs. John H., and to which of the three Mrs. Wiggins’s it appertains I don’t know. I wanted to open it, but it’s transportation. . . .

“Dash is frightful this morning. He whines and stands up on his hind legs. He misses Becky, who is gone to town. I took him to Barnet the other day, and he couldn’t eat his victuals after it. Pray God his intellectuals be not slipping.

“Mary is gone out for some soles. I suppose ’tis no use to ask you to come and partake of ’em; else there’s a steam-vessel.

“I am doing a tragi-comedy in two acts, and have got on tolerably; but it will be refused, or worse. I never had luck with anything my name was put to.

“Oh, I am so poorly! I *waked* it at my cousin’s the book-binder’s, who is now with God; or, if he is not, it’s no fault of mine.

“We hope the frank wines do not disagree with Mrs. Patmore. By the way, I like her.

“Did you ever taste frogs? Get them, if you can. They are like little Lilliput rabbits, only a thought nicer.

“Christ, how sick I am!—not of the world, but of the widow’s shrub. She’s sworn under £6000, but I think she perjured herself. She howls in *E la*, and I comfort her in *B flat*. You understand music? . . .

“‘No shrimps!’ (That’s in answer to Mary’s question about how the soles are to be done.)

“I am uncertain where this *wandering* letter may reach you. What you mean by *Poste Restante*, God knows. Do you mean I must pay the postage? So I do to Dover.

“We had a merry passage with the widow at the Commons. She was howling—part howling and part giving directions to the proctor—when crash! down went my sister through a crazy chair, and made the clerks grin, and I grinned, and the widow tittered—and then I knew that she was not inconsolable. Mary was more frightened than hurt.

“She’d make a good match for anybody (by she, I mean the widow).



"If he bring but a *relict* away,  
He is happy, nor heard to complain.

"SHENSTONE.

"Procter has got a wen growing out at the nape of his neck, which his wife wants him to have cut off; but I think it rather an agreeable excrescence—like his poetry—redundant. Hone has hanged himself for debt. Godwin was taken up for picking pockets. . . . Becky takes to bad courses. Her father was blown up in a steam machine. The coroner found it Insanity. I should not like him to sit on my letter.

"Do you observe my direction? Is it Gallic?—Classical?

"Do try and get some frogs. You must ask for 'grenouilles' (green-eels). They don't understand 'frogs,' though it's a common phrase with us.

"If you go through Bulloign (Boulogne) enquire if old Godfrey is living, and how he got home from the Crusades. He must be a very old man now.

"If there is anything new in politics or literature in France, keep it till I see you again, for I'm in no hurry. Chatty-Briant is well I hope.

"I think I have no more news; only give both our loves ('all three,' says Dash) to Mrs. Patmore, and bid her get quite well, as I am at present, bating qualms, and the grief incident to losing a valuable relation. C. L.

"Londres, July 19, 1827."

The tragi-comedy in two acts was "The Wife's Trial," a dramatic version of Crabbe's "Confidant." It was not produced on the stage. Of Lamb's cousin, the bookbinder, we know nothing. "Chatty-Briant" is the author of *Génie du Christianisme*.

On July 26th Lamb gives Mrs. Shelley, the poet's widow, further particulars of the play on which he is working, and his difficulties with it. He adds, "I am teaching Emma Latin to qualify her for a superior governess-ship; which we see no prospect of her getting. 'Tis like feeding a child with chopped hay from a spoon. Sisyphus his labours were as nothing to it. Actives and passives jostle in her nonsense, till a deponent enters, like Chaos, more to embroil the fray. Her prepositions are suppositions; her conjunctions copulative have no connection in them; her concords disagree; her interjections are purely

English 'Ah!' and 'Oh!' with a yawn and a gape in the same tongue; and she herself is a lazy, block-headly supine. As I say to her, *ass in presenti* rarely makes a wise man *in futuro*."

Mary Lamb seems also to have helped, as her sonnet "To Emma Learning Latin" (printed in *Blackwood* for June, 1829) tells us:—

Droop not, dear Emma, dry those falling tears,  
And call up smiles into thy pallid face,  
Pallid and care-worn with thy arduous race:  
In few brief months thou hast done the work of years,  
To young beginnings natural are these fears.  
A right good scholar shalt thou one day be,  
And that no distant one; when even she,  
Who now to thee a star far off appears,  
That more rare Latinist, the Northern Maid—  
The language-loving Sarah<sup>1</sup> of the Lake—  
Shall hail thee Sister Linguist. This will make  
Thy friends, who now afford thee careful aid,  
A recompense most rich for all their pains,  
Counting thy acquisitions their best gains.

A few weeks later Dibdin is informed that "Emma has just died, choak'd with a Gerund in dum. On opening her we found a Participle in rus in the pericordium."

It was probably some time in the summer of 1827 that Lamb wrote the fine letter to Mrs. Basil Montagu on the subject of the memorial to Thomas Clarkson, the abolitionist, which was to be raised in his life-time (for he lived until 1846) above Wade Mill, in Hertfordshire. Lamb contributed a guinea and these remarks: "Monuments to goodness, even after death, are equivocal. I turn away from Howard's, I scarce know why. Goodness blows no trumpet, nor desires to have it blown. We should be modest for a modest man—as he is for himself. The vanities of Life—Art, Poetry, Skill military—are subjects for trophies; not the silent thoughts arising in a good man's mind in lonely places. Was I [Clarkson,] I should never be able to walk or ride near — again. Instead of bread, we are giving him a stone. Instead of the locality recalling the noblest moment of his existence, it is a place at which his friends (that is, himself) blow to the world, 'What a good man is he!' I sat down upon a hillock at Forty Hill yesternight—a fine con-

<sup>1</sup> Mary Lamb's footnote: Daughter of S. T. Coleridge, Esq., an accomplished linguist in the Greek and Latin tongues, and translatress of a History of the Abipones.

templative evening,—with a thousand good speculations about mankind. How I yearned with cheap benevolence! I shall go and inquire of the stone-cutter, that cuts the tombstones here, what a stone with a short inscription will cost; just to say—‘Here C. Lamb loved his brethren of mankind.’”

On August 9th are letters from Charles Lamb to Stoddart, then Sir John, Chief Justice, and Justice of the Vice-Admiralty Court, in Malta, and from Mary Lamb to Lady Stoddart. Stoddart's son, a boy at Charterhouse, seems to have been getting into a scrape from which he had been extricated, I imagine, through Lamb's intervention with the headmaster. The punishment was the translation of Gray's *Elegy* into Greek elegiacs, with which Lamb had helped him.

On August 28th Lamb tells Barton that he has sent his play to Charles Kemble, and also four poems of his own, and one of Barton's, to a new and fashionable album. Chief of Lamb's contributions was the copy of verses entitled “In My Own Album,” which I print below—one of the saddest poems that I know:—

Fresh clad from heaven in robes of white,  
A young probationer of light,  
Thou wert my soul, an Album bright,

A spotless leaf; but thought, and care,  
And friend and foe, in foul or fair,  
Have “written strange defeatures” there;

And Time with heaviest hand of all,  
Like that fierce writing on the wall,  
Hath stamp'd sad dates—he can't recal;

And error gilding worse designs—  
Like speckled snake that strays and shines—  
Betrays his path by crooked lines;

And vice hath left his ugly blot;  
And good resolves, a moment hot,  
Fairly began—but finish'd not;

And fruitless, late remorse doth trace—  
Like Hebrew lore a backward pace—  
Her irrecoverable race.

Disjointed numbers; sense unknit;  
Huge reams of folly, shreds of wit;  
Compose the mingled mass of it.

My scalded eyes no longer brook  
Upon this ink-blurr'd thing to look—  
Go, shut the leaves, and clasp the book.



In September the brother and sister made a great decision: they definitely cut themselves adrift from London by taking a house at Enfield on Chase Side. It still stands almost as in the Lambs' day. In September Lamb tells Hood the news: "We have got our books into our new house. I am a drayhorse if I was not asham'd of the indigested dirty lumber, as I toppled 'em out of the cart, and blest Becky that came with 'em for her having an unstuff'd brain with such rubbish. We shall get in by Michael's mass. 'Twas with some pain we were evuls'd from Colebrook. You may find some of our flesh sticking to the door posts. To change habitations is to die to them, and in my time I have died seven deaths. But I don't know whether every such change does not bring with it a rejuveniscence. 'Tis an enterprise, and shoves back the sense of death's approximating, which, tho' not terrible to me, is at all times particularly distasteful. My house-deaths have generally been periodical, recurring after seven years, but this last is premature by half that time. Cut off in the flower of Colebrook. The Middletonian stream and all its echoes mourn. Even minnows dwindle. A parvis fiunt MINIMI.<sup>1</sup> I fear to invite Mrs. Hood to our new mansion, lest she envy it, & rote [? rout] us. But when we are fairly in, I hope she will come & try it. I heard she & you were made uncomfortable by some unworthy-to-be-cared-for attacks, and have tried to set up a feeble counteraction thro' the Table Book of last Saturday.<sup>2</sup> Has it not reach'd you, that you are silent about it? Our new domicile is no manor house, but new, & externally not inviting, but furnish'd within with every convenience. Capital new locks to every door, capital grates in every room, with nothing to pay for incoming & the rent £10 less than the Islington one. It was built a few years since at £1100 expence, they tell me, & I perfectly believe it. And I get it for £35 exclusive of moderate taxes. We think ourselves most lucky. It is not our intention to abandon Regent Street, & West End perambulations (monastic & terrible thought!) but occasionally to breathe the FRESHER AIR of the metropolis. We shall put up a bedroom or two (all we want) for occasional ex-rustication, where we shall visit, not be visited. Plays too we'll see,—perhaps our own. Urbani Sylvani, & Sylvan Urban-

<sup>1</sup> Their smallness grows to a minnowmum.

<sup>2</sup> "The Defeat of Time." See page 579.

uses in turns. Courtiers for a spurt, then philosophers. Old homely tell-truths and learn-truths in the virtuous shades of Enfield, Liars again and mocking gibbers in the coffee houses & resorts of London. What can a mortal desire more for his bi-parted nature?

“O the curds & cream you shall eat with us here!

“O the turtle soup and lobster sallads we shall devour with you there!

“O the old books we shall peruse here!

“O the new nonsense we shall trifle over there!

“O Sir T. Browne!—here.

“O Mr. Hood & Mr. Jerdan there.

thine,

“C (urbanus) L (sylvanus) (ELIA ambo)——.”

Unhappily the excitements of moving were too much for Mary Lamb, and she again fell ill, so that the early days in the new house were sad ones for Lamb and Emma Isola. The attack was one of the longest from which she had suffered.

The interesting reminiscences of Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb which were contributed by the late Thomas Westwood to *Notes and Queries*, begin with the day in the summer of 1827 on which they made the great plunge and took a house as far from their beloved city as Enfield. Thomas Westwood was then a boy of thirteen, living next door. Writing in 1866 he said: “My first glimpse of the Lamb household, however, is as vivid in my recollection as if it were of yesterday. It was in Enfield. Leaning idly out of window, I saw a group of three issuing from the ‘gambogey-looking cottage’ close at hand: a slim middle-aged man, in quaint, uncontemporary habiliments; a rather shapeless bundle of an old lady, in a bonnet like a mob-cap; and a young girl. While before them, bounded a riotous dog (Hood’s immortal ‘Dash’), holding a board with ‘This House to be Let’ on it, in his jaws. Lamb was on his way back to the house-agent, and that was his fashion of announcing that he had taken the premises.”

Westwood’s recollections range over the next few years, extending to the time when, after leaving the gambogey-looking cottage, the Lambs moved under his father’s roof; but I think they may come here not unfittingly. “I soon grew to be on intimate terms with my neighbour; who let me loose in his



LAMBS TWO HOMES AT ENFIELD, AS THEY NOW ARE (1910)

HE LIVED IN THE WHITE HOUSE, ON THE RIGHT, FROM MICHAELMAS, 1827, UNTIL OCTOBER, 1826,  
AND LODGED IN THE WESTWOODS' HOUSE, ON THE LEFT, FROM OCTOBER, 1826, UNTIL MAY, 1833





library, and initiated me into a school of literature, which Mrs. Trimmer might not have considered the most salutary under the circumstances. Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Farquhar, Defoe, Fielding—these were the pastures in which I delighted to graze, in those early years; and which, in spite of Trimmers, I believe did me less evil than good. My heart yearns, even now, to those old books. Their faces seem all familiar to me, even their patches and botches, the work of a wizened old cobbler hard by: for little wotted Lamb of Roger Paynes and Charles Lewises. A cobbler was his bookbinder; and the rougher the restoration, the greater the success.

“There were few modern volumes in his collection; and subsequently, such presentation copies as he received were wont to find their way into my own book-case, and often through eccentric channels. A Leigh Hunt, for instance, would come skimming to my feet through the branches of the apple-trees (our gardens were contiguous); or a Bernard Barton would be rolled downstairs after me, from the library door. *Marcian Colonna*<sup>1</sup> I remember finding on my window-sill, damp with the night's fog; and the *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* I picked out of the strawberry-bed. It was not that Lamb was indifferent to the literary doings of his friends; but their books, as books, were unharmonious on his shelves. They clashed, both in outer and inner entity, with the Marlows and Miltons that were his household gods.

“When any notable visitors made their appearance at the cottage, Mary Lamb's benevolent tap at my window-pane seldom failed to summon me out, and I was presently ensconced in a quiet corner of their sitting-room, half hid in some great man's shadow. Of the discourse of these *divi majores* I have no recollection now; but the faces of some of them I can still partially recall. Hazlitt's, for instance, keen and aggressive, with eyes that flashed out epigram. Tom Hood's, a Methodist parson face: not a ripple breaking through the lines of it, though every word he dropped was a pun, and every pun roused a roar of laughter. Leigh Hunt's, parcel genial, parcel democratic, with as much rabid politics on his lips as honey from Mount Hybla. Miss Kelly's, plain, but engaging. (The most unprofessional of actresses, and unspoiled of women; the bloom of the child on her

<sup>1</sup> By Barry Cornwall.

cheek, undefaced by the rouge, to speak in a metaphor.) She was one of the most dearly welcome of Lamb's guests. Wordsworth's, farmerish and respectable, but with something of the great poet occasionally breaking out and glorifying forehead and eyes.

"Then there was Martin Burney, ugliest of men, hugest of eaters, honestest of friends. I see him closeted with Mary Lamb, reading the Gospel of St. John *for the first time*. And Sheridan Knowles, burly and jovial, striding into Lamb's breakfast-room one spring morning—a great branch of May-blossom in his hand. And George Darley, scholar and poet—slow of speech and gentle of strain: Miss Kelly's constant shadow in her walks amongst the Enfield woodlands."

We have seen that Mary Lamb had taught Latin to Victoria Novello and William Hazlitt the younger, and later to Emma Isola; she also tended the young Latinity of Thomas Westwood. In his second batch of recollections, written in 1870, he says: "Excellent Bridget Elia! She was a good Latinist and a great devourer of novels, and I am proud to avow that my first knowledge of Latin and first taste for fiction both came from her. The late Mr. Moxon was in the habit at that time of sending the Lambs huge parcels of modern novels destined for sale, and therefore not to be cut open, nor long detained; and these, for economy of time, my old friend and I read together (Bridget in her arm-chair, myself kneeling on the floor), tunneling the pages we were not allowed to cut, and falling into a wonderful identity of selection as to what we should read and what skip."

In 1872 Mr. Westwood again returned to his pleasant task of setting down old Enfield memories. "I see the room now—the brisk fire in the grate—the lighted card-table some paces off—Charles and Mary Lamb and Emma Isola . . . seated round it, playing whist—the old books thronging the old shelves—the Titian and Da Vinci engravings on the walls, and in the spaces between Emma Isola's pretty copies, in Indian ink, of the prints in Bagster's edition of the *Compleat Angler*."

It is with Izaak Walton and fishing that Westwood's name is associated in literature; for he not only wrote the *Chronicle of the Compleat Angler*, 1864, but he compiled with Thomas Satchell *Bibliotheca Piscatoria, a Catalogue of Books on Angling, the Fisheries and Fish Culture*, 1883, a monu-



mental work invaluable to students of the gentle art. In the preface to the *Chronicle of the Compleat Angler* Westwood wrote of Lamb again: "In the ragged regiment of Lamb's book-tatterdemalions (a regiment I was permitted to manœuvre at will, though not much taller at the time than its tallest folio), was an early copy of the 'Compleat Angler,' I believe (for those were not bibliomaniacal days,) Hawkins' edition of 1760. This was my chief treasure, my pearl of price; and, perched on the forked branch of an ancient apple-tree, in the little overgrown orchard, and at an elevation from which I could almost catch a glimpse of the marshy levels of the Lea itself, it was my delight to sally forth with Piscator, on that perennial May morning, to dib with him for 'logger-headed chub,' to listen to his discourse, to learn his songs by heart, to store up his precepts, and to steep my boyish mind in the picturesque darkness of his manifold superstitions. Though no angler himself, Lamb was a lover of angling books, and I well remember his relating to me, as he paced to and fro, a quaint, scholastic figure, under the apple-tree aforesaid, how he had pounced upon his early copy, in some ramshackled repository of marine stores, and how grievous had been his disappointment in finding that its unlikely-looking owner knew as much of its mercantile value as himself."

In a little pamphlet of verse, published in 1884, entitled *Twelve Sonnets and an Epilogue*, Westwood again associated Lamb and Walton:—

Two great and good men oft have trod your ground,  
 Old "Totnam Hill"—one, Izaak, blythe of blee,  
 Armed with the Fisher's pastoral panoply,  
 Panier and Angle-rod, lissome and round;—  
 The other, Elia, studious, quaint and fine,  
 With lustrous eye, brooding—one's fancy saith,—  
 On "spacious times of great Elizabeth,"  
 Peopled with retinue of Shades divine.  
 Izaak, I see, intent on mead and down—  
 On piping throstle and on blossomed spray;  
 But Elia's face is turned another way,  
 Drawn by the roar and tumult of the town.  
 Yet, did they meet, in sooth, those twain, what speech  
 Could gauge the gladness in the heart of each?

Of Westwood himself it is time to speak. He was born in 1814: writing to Wordsworth in January, 1830, Lamb says that old Mr. Westwood (Gaffer Westwood he called him) "sighs

only now and then, when he thinks that he has a son on his hands about fifteen." This son Lamb was instrumental in placing in his friend Aders' office, and we may certainly attribute to the Lambs his interest in literature, which led him to vary his business career very agreeably with poetry and amateur literary work. One of his lyrics, "Love in the Alpuracas," was warmly praised by Landor, who even declared that he envied it. Westwood ultimately settled in Belgium, in a post of importance connected with a railway company, and he died there in 1888.

Until early in the year 1904 Enfield had one resident at any rate who remembered Lamb. This was the late Miss Louisa Vale, who for more than fifty years had a school a few doors from Lamb's house. Among her pupils were Thomas and Frances Westwood, the children of Lamb's landlord. The "Poplars," the Lambs' only independent Enfield house, was, said Miss Vale, much smaller in their day. Indeed it must have been, for it is now quite a large house, larger than would be needful for two such very modest people. Miss Vale, however, was too ardent a teetotaller quite to appreciate her neighbours, but she remembered that Lamb once called upon her, and was pleasant though odd. His growing fame, and the procession of American pilgrims to Enfield, drawn thither by his connection with Chase Side, presented, I gather, some difficulty to Miss Vale's mind.

To return to the course of the year 1827, on October 4th is an interesting letter to Barron Field, declining a request that Lamb should write a description of the theatrical portraits in the collection of Charles Mathews, upon which he had lightly touched, in his best manner, in an essay on the old actors in the *London Magazine* some few years earlier. He replies: "I know my own utter unfitness for such a task. I am no hand at describing costumes, a great requisite in an account of mannered pictures. I have not the slightest acquaintance with pictorial language even. An imitator of me, or rather pretender to be *me*, in his Rejected Articles, has made me minutely describe the dresses of the *poissardes* at Calais!<sup>1</sup>—I could as soon resolve Euclid. I have no eye for forms and fashions. I substitute analysis, and get rid of the phenomenon by slurring in for it its impression. I am sure you must have observed this defect, or peculiarity, in my writings; else the delight would be in-

<sup>1</sup> Patmore. See page 523.

calculable in doing such a thing for Mathews, whom I greatly like—and Mrs. Mathews, whom I almost greatly like. What a feast 'twould be to be sitting at the pictures painting 'em into words; but I could almost as soon make words into pictures. I speak this deliberately, and not out of modesty. I pretty well know what I can't do."

The letter, continuing, gives us a sight of the Lambs' poor cousin the bookbinder. "My sister's verses are homely, but just what they should be; I send them, not for the poetry, but the good sense and good-will of them.<sup>1</sup> I was beginning to transcribe; but Emma is sadly jealous of its getting into more hands, and I won't spoil it in her eyes by divulging it. Come to Enfield, and *read it*. As my poor cousin, the bookbinder, now with God, told me, most sentimentally, that having purchased a picture of fish at a dead man's sale, his heart ached to see how the widow grieved to part with it, being her dear husband's favourite; and he almost apologised for his generosity by saying he could not help telling the widow she was 'welcome to come and look at it'—e.g. at *his house*—'as often as she pleased.' There was the germ of generosity in an uneducated mind. He had just *reading* enough from the backs of books for the '*nec sinit esse feros*'—had he read inside, the same impulse would have led him to give back the two-guinea thing—with a request to see it, now and then, at *her house*. We are parroted into delicacy."

A letter from Crabb Robinson to Dorothy Wordsworth, dated December 3rd, 1827, contains a reference to the Lambs, and to the Album verses which I have quoted above: "I am sorry to inform you that poor Mary Lamb was taken ill some time back, and I have not heard of her restoration. Lamb went into the country early in the summer and was so delighted with Enfield that he took a house on the green—and in the changing about Miss L. was taken ill. I am sorry, independently of this, that L. should have taken such a step. The solitude is much too great for him. Yet he enjoyed his summer there greatly. He wrote a number of poems, he says, besides a comedy which I fear has been rejected by Covent Garden. In the chance that you may not have seen the Bijou I send you a poem by him which you will read with very mixed feelings of pleasure and pain."

<sup>1</sup> The sonnet on page 585.



On December 20th Lamb tells Allsop that they are comfortable again, and on the 22nd he assures Moxon that they "intend a delicious quiet Christmas day, dull and friendless." Two extracts from Robinson's *Diary* close the year:—

"December 26th, 1827:—Having heard from Charles Lamb that his sister was again well, I lost no time in going to see them. And accordingly, as soon as breakfast was over, I walked into the City and took the Edmonton stage and walked thence to Enfield. A fine ride. I found them in their new house—a small but comfortable place, and Charles Lamb quite delighted with his retirement. He fears not the solitude of the situation, though he seems to be almost without an acquaintance, and dreads rather than seeks visitors. We called on Mrs. [Antony] Robinson, who lives opposite; she was not at home, but came over and spent the evening . . . and made a fourth in a rubber of whist. I took a bed at a near public-house.

"December 27th:—I breakfasted with the Lambs, and they then accompanied me on my way through the Green Lanes. I had an agreeable walk home, reading on the way Roper's 'Life of Sir T. More.'"

## CHAPTER XLVI

1828

A Quiet Year—The Cowden Clarkes at Enfield—Their Recollections of Lamb and his Sister—Mary Lamb's Appearance—An American Edition of *Elia*.

**E**IGHTEEN HUNDRED AND TWENTY-EIGHT was a very quiet year, made more so by the absence of Emma Isola, who accepted, I imagine at the beginning of it, a situation as governess in the house of Mrs. Williams, the wife of the rector of Fornham, in Suffolk, near Bury St. Edmunds. Lamb's health does not seem to have improved. He began the year in a very poor state, and with the exception of acrostics and such trifles and a few unimportant letters, he wrote nothing.

Crabb Robinson again helps us a little :—

“April 4th, 1828 :—As soon as breakfast was over, I set out on a walk to Lamb's, whom I reached in three and a quarter hours—at one. . . . At Lamb's I found Moxon and Miss Kelly. Miss K. is an unaffected, sensible, clear-headed, warm-hearted woman. She has none of the vanities or arrogance of the actress. No one would suspect her profession from her conversation or manners. We talked about the French theatre, and dramatic matters in general. Mary Lamb and Charles were glad to have a dummy rubber, and also piquet with me. Moxon and I left at ten.

“May 21 :—At Talfourd's. The party consisted of the Lambs, Wordsworth, Miss Anne Rutt and 3 barristers, Shepherd, Malkin and Whitcomb. . . . Lamb in excellent spirits but without extravagance. Wordsworth not very chatty but seemed pleased with Lamb. . . . I brought Lamb to my chambers, where he took Hollands and water and sat up late.

“May 22 :—Rose early, and finding Lamb bent on going away, made up a fire and breakfast for him, and accompanied him to

the Enfield stage, loading him with books, and a print of Blake's Chaucer's pilgrims."

A note to Cary in June tells how little fitted Lamb had become for London dinner parties: "I long to see Wordsworth once more before he goes hence, but it would be at the expense of health and comfort my infirmities cannot afford. Once only I have been at a dinner party, to meet him, for a whole year past, and I do not know that I am not the worse for it now. There is a necessity for my drinking too much (don't show this to the Bishop of —, your friend) at and after dinner; then I require spirits at night to allay the crudity of the weaker Bacchus; and in the morning I cool my parched stomach with a fiery libation. Then I am aground in town, and call upon my London friends, and get new wets of ale, porter, etc.; then ride home, drinking where the coach stops, as duly as Edward set up his Waltham Crosses. This, or near it, was the process of my experiment of dining at Talfourd's to meet Wordsworth, and I am not well now. Now let me beg that we may meet here with assured safety to both sides. Darley and Procter come here on Sunday morning; pray arrange to come along with them. Here I can be tolerably moderate. In town, the very air of town turns my head and is intoxication enough, if intoxication knew a limit."

To the circumstance that after their wedding on July 5th, 1828, Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke spent their honeymoon at Enfield, unknown to the Lambs, we owe some very agreeable reminiscences of the brother and sister at a slightly later period. In the words of the Cowden Clarks' *Recollections of Writers*, "Dear Charles and Mary Lamb, who were then residing at Chase Side, Enfield, paid us the compliment of affecting to take it a little in dudgeon that we should not have let them know when we 'lurked at the Greyhound' so near to them; but his own letter, written soon after that time, shows how playfully and how kindly he really took this 'stealing a match before one's face.' He made us promise to repair our transgression by coming to spend a week or ten days with him and his sister; and gladly did we avail ourselves of the offered pleasure under name of reparation."

"During the forenoons and afternoons of this memorable visit we used to take the most enchanting walks in all directions of the lovely neighbourhood. Over by Winchmore Hill, through



Southgate Wood to Southgate and back : on one occasion stopping at a village linendraper's shop that stood in the hamlet of Winchmore Hill, that Mary Lamb might make purchase of some little household requisite she needed ; and Charles Lamb, hovering near with us, while his sister was being served by the mistress of the shop, addressed her, in a tone of mock sympathy, with the words, ' I hear that trade's falling off, Mrs. Udall, how's this ? ' The stout, good-natured matron only smiled, as accustomed to Lamb's whimsical way, for he was evidently familiarly known at the houses where his sister dealt. Another time a longer excursion was proposed, when Miss Lamb declined accompanying us, but said she would meet us on our return, as the walk was farther than she thought she could manage. It was to Northaw ; through charming lanes, and country by-roads, and we went hoping to see a famous old giant oak-tree there. . . . Mary Lamb was as good as her word—when was she otherwise ? and came to join us on our way back and be with us on our reaching home, there to make us comfortable in old-fashion easy-chairs for ' a good rest ' before dinner.

" The evenings were spent in cosy talk ; Lamb often taking his pipe, as he sat by the fire-side, and puffing quietly between the intervals of discussing some choice book, or telling some racy story, or uttering some fine, thoughtful remark. On the first evening of our visit he had asked us if we could play whist, as he liked a rubber ; but on our confessing to very small skill at the game, he said, ' Oh, then, you're right not to play ; I hate playing with bad players.' . . . His style of playful bluntness when speaking to his intimates was strangely pleasant—nay, welcome : it gave you the impression of his liking you well enough to be rough and unceremonious with you ; it showed you that he felt at home with you. It accorded with what you knew to be at the root of an ironical assertion he made—that he always gave away gifts, parted with presents, and *sold* keepsakes.<sup>1</sup> It underlay in sentiment the drollery and reversed truth

<sup>1</sup> A grain of truth in it too. John Chambers's recollections of Lamb, from which I have already quoted, tell us that he was once presented with a handsome watch by a friend who had noticed that he lacked one. On the next day he was watchless as ever, and on being asked where it was he replied laconically, " Pawned." We have also seen him, in Thomas Westwood's reminiscences, pitching presentation copies of his friends' books into the garden. And Moxon relates that he threw at a passing hackney coachman the acorns from an ilex on Virgil's tomb which a pious pilgrim had given to him.

of his saying to us, 'I always call my sister Maria when we are alone together, Mary when we are with our friends, and Moll before the servants.'"

Talfourd also draws attention to Lamb's playful and loving rudenesses to his sister: "He would touch the inmost pulse of profound affection, and then break off in some jest, which would seem profane 'to ears polite,' but carry as profound a meaning to those who had the right key, as his most pathetic suggestions; and where he loved and doted most, he would vent the overflowing of his feelings in words that looked like rudeness. He touches on this strange resource of love in his 'Farewell to Tobacco,' in a passage which may explain some startling freedoms with those he himself loved most dearly.

" — Irony all, and feign'd abuse,  
Such as perplex lovers use,  
At a need, when, in despair  
To paint forth their fairest fair;  
Or in part but to express  
That exceeding comeliness  
Which their fancies doth so strike,  
They borrow language of dislike;  
And, instead of 'Dearest Miss,'  
Jewel, Honey, Sweetheart, Bliss,  
And those forms of old admiring,  
Call her Cockatrice and Siren,  
Basilisk, and all that's evil,  
Witch, Hyena, Mermaid, Devil,  
Ethiop, Wench, and Blackamoor,  
Monkey, Ape, and twenty more;  
Friendly Traitress, loving Foe,—  
Not that she is truly so,  
But no other way they know  
A contentment to express,  
Borders so upon excess,  
That they do not rightly wot  
Whether it be pain or not.

Thus, in the very excess of affection to his sister, whom he loved above all else on earth, he would sometimes address to her some words of seeming reproach, yet so tinged with a humorous irony that none but an entire stranger could mistake his drift."

In the recollections of Lamb by Mrs. Balmanno, from which I quote in the previous chapter, she describes a visit from the Lambs to herself and mentions a piece of mischievous rudeness on Lamb's part which covered his sister with confusion. Later

in the evening he atoned for it and all was well again. Hood subsequently told Mrs. Balmanno that after a period when Lamb's jokes at his sister's expense had been rather more numerous than usual Lamb made up his mind to stop them. He behaved for a few days "admirably," until Miss Lamb asked him tearfully what she had done that he should be so cruel.

There is, as Talfourd says, a familiarity that to a stranger, unacquainted with the character of the speaker, seems thoughtless or even worse; yet here, as in so many other cases, to know all is to forgive all. The example cited by Mrs. Balmanno is on the face of it certainly not pretty, and I am not concerned to defend it; but, without having seen Lamb's expression and heard his tones, one would not dare—knowing what we do of him—to condemn it. Some men may say anything, smoothing their rudeness with a rectifying smile, and Charles Lamb was chief of them. But in any case he and his sister, being two old humorists of lifelong intimacy, were enfranchised beyond ordinary folk.

In a book published in America quite recently, entitled *Letters to an Enthusiast*, consisting of letters from Mrs. Cowden Clarke to Mrs. Balmanno's son, I find this passage: "You ask me if I knew Charles Lamb. I thank God, I did. This very enthusiasm about the malt beverage reminds me of pleasant things in my privileged intercourse with him. I was an honoured partaker in one of those country walks of his, when he would stop at some little roadside inn, and have some cool porter. He preferred porter to ale, and I remember his especially expressing his approval of my taste when I ventured to second his commendation of Barclay and Perkins's porter as superior to any other brewers'. I think he liked that a girl should have an opinion in porter, and not be afraid of avowing it. . . .

"In one of these green lane walks, admirable Miss Kelly happened to be at Enfield with us that day; and I remember his being pleased that both she and I sat in the little porch and pledged him, while he had the beer brought there. He always liked to see women superior to fine ladyism and affectation, though no one had a truer appreciation of real feminine refinement. I recollect his trying me with one of his whimsical ways in that kind of test once. Charles and I were down at Enfield for a few days, and went one evening with himself and his beloved sister Mary to drink tea with some people who had invited

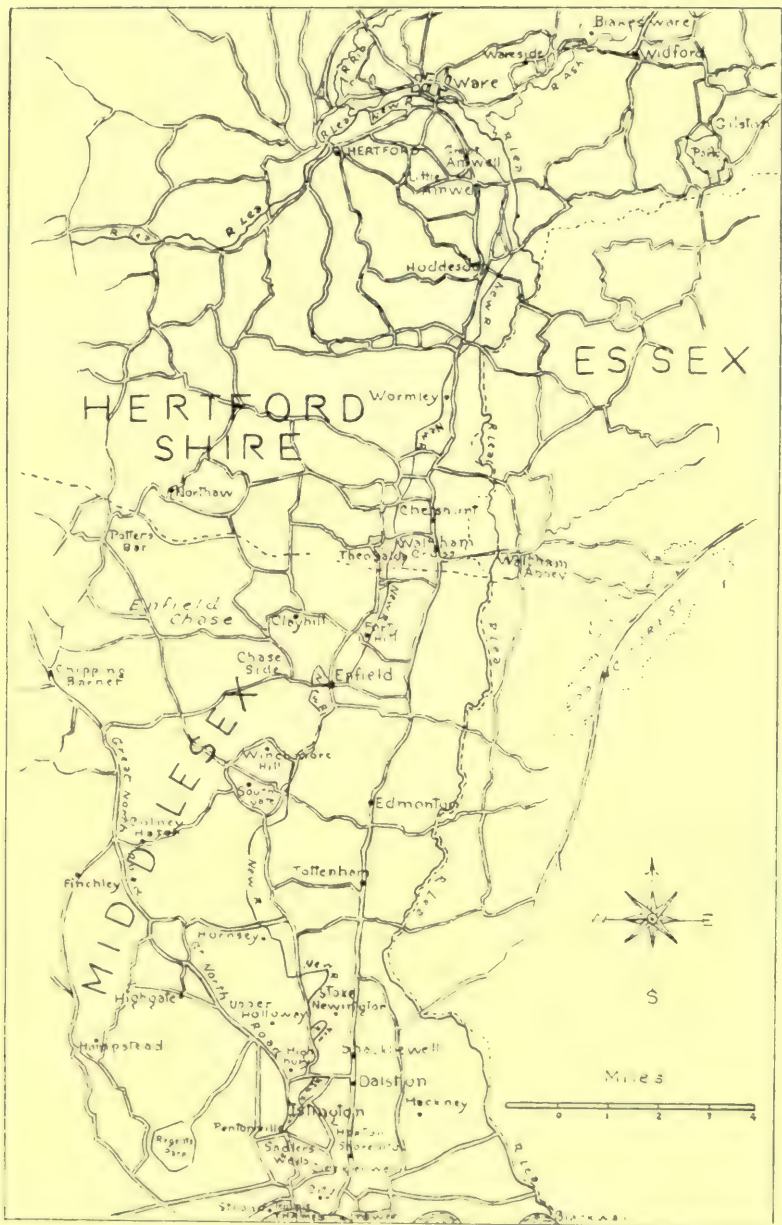


them both. Charles Lamb and I chanced to outwalk my Charles and Miss Lamb, and we arrived first at the house, a ladies' school. The lady of the house received us politely, and expressed herself pleased to see—bowing to me—any friend of Mr. Lamb's with him. He answered her inquiry after his sister, by saying that she had a horrible toothache, and had stayed at home; and Mr. C. C. had remained to keep her company. And then he added, 'His wife and I, as we came along, were hoping that you might have sprats for supper to-night, Mrs. ——.' You might imagine the effect that this produced, in a somewhat prim company-assembly; but I could see that he was pleased at my not being in the slightest discomposed at this singular introduction to a strange lady, in a strange house."

And here is another passage from the Cowden Clarkes' pages: "He was so proud of his pedestrian feats and indefatigability, that he once told the Cowden Clarkes a story of a dog possessed by a pertinacious determination to follow him day by day when he went forth to wander in the Enfield lanes and fields; until, unendurably teased by the pertinacity of this obtrusive animal, he determined to get rid of him by fairly *tiring him out!* So he took him a circuit of many miles, including several of the loveliest spots round Enfield, coming at last to a by-road with an interminable vista of up-hill distance, where the dog turned tail, gave the matter up, and lay down beneath a hedge, panting, exhausted, thoroughly worn out and dead beat; while his defeater walked freshly home, smiling and triumphant."

The Cowden Clarkes relate, as an instance of Lamb's sympathy with dumb creatures, that they saw him "get up from table, while they were dining with him and his sister at Enfield, open the street door, and give admittance to a stray donkey into the front strip of garden, where there was a grass-plot, which he said seemed to possess more attraction for the creature than the short turf of the common on Chase-side, opposite to the house where the Lambs then dwelt."

To come to more intimate matters, Charles Lamb, says Cowden Clarke, "had three striking personal peculiarities: his eyes were of different colours, one being greyish blue, the other brownish hazel; his hair was thick, retaining its abundance and its dark-brown hue with scarcely a single grey hair among it until even the latest period of his life; and he had a smile of singular sweetness and beauty.



THE FLAME COUNTRY

FROM A MAP DRAWN BY MISS M. C. G. JACKSON





“Miss Lamb bore a strong personal resemblance to her brother; being in stature under middle height, possessing well-cut features, and a countenance of singular sweetness, with intelligence. Her brown eyes were soft, yet penetrating; her nose and mouth very shapely; while the general expression was mildness itself. She had a speaking-voice, gentle and persuasive; and her smile was her brother's own—winning in the extreme. There was a certain catch, or emotional breathingness, in her utterance, which gave an inexpressible charm to her reading of poetry, and which lent a captivating earnestness to her mode of speech when addressing those she liked. This slight check, with its yearning, eager effect in her voice, had something softenedly akin to her brother Charles's impediment of articulation: in him it scarcely amounted to a stammer; in her it merely imparted additional stress to the fine-sensed suggestions she made to those whom she counselled or consoled. She had a mind at once nobly-toned and practical, making her ever a chosen source of confidence among her friends, who turned to her for consolation, confirmation, and advice, in matters of nicest moment, always secure of deriving from her both aid and solace. Her manner was easy, almost homely, so quiet, unaffected, and perfectly unpretending was it. Beneath the sparing talk and retired carriage, few casual observers would have suspected the ample information and large intelligence that lay comprised there. She was oftener a listener than a speaker. In the modest-havioured woman simply sitting there, taking small share in general conversation, few who did not know her would have imagined the accomplished classical scholar, the excellent understanding, the altogether rarely-gifted being, morally and mentally, that Mary Lamb was.

“Her apparel was always of the plainest kind; a black stuff or silk gown, made and worn in the simplest fashion. She took snuff liberally—a habit that had evidently grown out of her propensity to sympathize with and share all her brother's tastes; and it certainly had the effect of enhancing her likeness to him. She had a small, white, and delicately-formed hand; and as it hovered above the tortoise-shell box containing the powder so strongly approved by them both, in search of the stimulating pinch, the act seemed yet another link of association between the brother and sister, when hanging together over their favourite books and studies. . . .

“There was a certain old-world fashion in Mary Lamb’s diction which gave it a most natural and quaintly pleasant effect, and which heightened rather than detracted from the more heartfelt or important things she uttered. She had a way of repeating her brother’s words assentingly when he spoke to her.”<sup>1</sup>

Of the brother and sister alone, or with only one or two friends, Procter thus writes: “Charles Lamb sate, when at home, always near the table. At the opposite side was his sister, engaged in some domestic work, knitting or sewing, or poring over a modern novel. ‘Bridget in some things is behind her years.’ In fact, although she was ten years older than her brother, she had more sympathy with modern books and with youthful fancies than he had. She wore a neat cap, of the fashion of her youth; an old-fashioned dress. Her face was pale and somewhat square; but very placid; with gray intelligent eyes. She was very mild in her manner to strangers; and to her brother gentle and tender, always. She had often an upward look of peculiar meaning, when directed towards him; as though to give him assurance that all was then well with her. His affection for her was somewhat less on the surface; but always present. There was great gratitude intermingled with it.”

Mary Victoria Cowden Clarke died in 1898, full of years, only a short time after the publication of her autobiography *My Long Life*. Her claim to an honoured place in English literature rests upon her *Complete Concordance to Shakespeare*. Her husband Charles Cowden Clarke was born in 1787, and was thus twelve years younger than Lamb. His father kept a school at Enfield, moving thither from Northampton, where, as we have seen, he had had as fellow usher George Dyer. Among Clarke’s Enfield pupils was John Keats, whom Charles Cowden Clarke knew intimately; another Enfield scholar was Edward Holmes, the writer on Mozart, who became a pupil of Novello and was known to Lamb. Cowden Clarke joined his father-in-law Vincent Novello

<sup>1</sup> In a copy of Procter’s Memoir of Lamb which belonged to Cowden Clarke, and has been lent to me by Mr. F. G. Edwards, are many pencilled notes and marks of approbation or difference, by C. C. C. I quote two or three: “I heard him [Lamb] say that he could not name a standard quotation in all the Waverley novels. But he greatly admired—as a story—*Kenilworth*. . . . He once depreciated *Rosamund Gray* to me, saying that he wrote it in imitation of Mackenzie [*Julie de Roubigné*]. . . . At times he [Lamb] would take pleasure in worrying Godwin [who had begun as a Minister of the Gospel]. I once heard him call out, ‘Godwin, I have your volume of *Sermons* up there.’”

in business, wrote some pleasant books, edited (his finest achievement) Nyren's *Young Cricketer's Tutor*, lectured, read publicly from Shakespeare, became intimate with Dickens, and after a life of sunny popularity died in 1877.

*Blackwood* published Lamb's little play "The Wife's Trial" in the number for December, 1828. Writing to Procter Lamb says: "Blackwood sent me £20 for the drama. Somebody cheated me out of it next day; and my new pair of breeches, just sent home, cracking at first putting on, I exclaimed, in my wrath, 'All tailors are cheats, and all men are tailors.' Then I was better."

As in 1827, so in 1828, an extract from Crabb Robinson's *Diary* brings the year to a close: "December 13th:—I dined with Charles and Mary Lamb, and after dinner had a long spell at dummy whist with them. When they went to bed, I read a little drama by Lamb, 'The Intruding Widow' ['The Wife's Trial'], which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*. It is a piece of great feeling, but quite unsuitable for performance, there being no action whatever in it."

*Elia*, as I have said, did not become popular in England until long after Lamb's death, but in America, where it was published in 1828, it so pleased the book buyer that the publishers, Carey, Lea and Carey, of Philadelphia, hastened to issue a Second Series of their own compiling, made up, in their generosity, not only of Lamb's prose, from the *Works* and the *London Magazine*, but also of three essays of which he was guiltless, the work of Allan Cunningham and Procter. In conversation with Lamb in 1834, as we shall see, Nathaniel Parker Willis discovered that his American success gratified Lamb not a little; and he was well pleased with the unauthorised Second Series, even though a mistake had been made.



## CHAPTER XLVII

1829

A Revival of Good Spirits—Emma Isola's Album—Lamb's Choice of Old Poetry—“The Gypsy's Malison”—A Joke upon Crabb Robinson—Crabb Robinson at Enfield—Becky the Tyrant—Mary Lamb's Illness—Lamb Alone—“Leisure” and a Recantation—Housekeeping Given Up—The Westwoods—A Godson—A Short Way with Bankrupts—Lamb in the Political Arena.

**I**F we may judge by the letters, which become full of fun again, the year 1829 began in better spirits. But in July Mary Lamb was again taken ill, and again the attack was a very long one and her brother's sufferings consequently severe. She was now, it must be remembered, sixty-five years of age, and thus less able to withstand her malady.

In one of the first letters of 1829—to Procter on January 19th—Lamb asks for some verses for Emma Isola's album; “a girl of gold” he calls her. In the next he says: “Don't trouble yourself about the verses. Take 'em coolly as they come. Any day between this and Midsummer will do. Ten lines the extreme. There is no mystery in my incognita. She has often seen you, though you may not have observed a silent brown girl, who for the last twelve years [only eight years, I think,] has rambled about our house in her Christmas holidays. She is Italian by name and extraction.” Lamb always wrote charmingly of his adopted daughter. “Beautiful in reconciliation” is a phrase he applies to her in a letter to Moxon.

Emma Isola's album, for which so many of Lamb's friends wrote poems, no longer exists in its original form; the more valuable pages were cut out to be sold singly as autographs. But in addition to the album Miss Isola possessed an extract book which Lamb made for her, largely with his own hand, and this book is now in the possession of the Misses Moxon, Emma Isola's daughters, who have allowed me to examine it. In addition to

original matter it contains, in Lamb's writing, a number of well-known poems, and of these I add a list, since it seems to me very interesting to know the kind of poetry which so fine a critic prescribed for a youthful reader.

"The Female Phaeton."—PRIOR.

"The Garland."—PRIOR.

"A Song in Commemoration of Music" ("When whispering strains do softly steal").—STRODE.

"Love me not for comely grace."—From WILBYE'S *Madrigals*, 1609.

"Love."—COLERIDGE.

"A Fair and Happy Milkmaid."—SIR T. OVERBURY.

"Fair Helen of Kirkconnel."

"The Prioress to Fair Millicent" (from the old play of "The Merry Devil of Edmonton").

"To the Dying Soul."—PRIOR.

#### SONNET

*Written on seeing BEWICK'S Chalk Drawing of the Head of HAZLITT*

BY SHERIDAN KNOWLES

Thus HAZLITT looked! There's life in every line!  
 Soul — language — fire that colour could not give,  
 See! on that brow how pale-robed thought divine,  
 In an embodied radiance seems to live!  
 Ah! in the gaze of that entranced eye,  
 Humid, yet burning, there beams passion's flame,  
 Lighting the cheek, and quivering through the frame;  
 While round the lips, the odour of a sigh  
 Yet hovers fondly, and its shadow sits  
 Beneath the channel of the glowing thought  
 And fire-clothed eloquence, which comes in fits  
 Like Pythiac inspiration!—Bewick, taught  
 By thee, in vain doth slander's venom'd dart  
 Do its foul work 'gainst *him*. This head *must* own a heart.

"Cherries."—DRUMMOND.

"On a Drop of Dew."—MARVELL.

"Lucy and Colin."—TICKELL.

"To a Bird that haunted the waters of Lacken."—THURLOW.

"To the Nightingale."—MOXON.

"To a Child of Quality."—PRIOR.

"Sir John Grahame and Barbara Allen."

"O Waly Waly up the Bank."

"Sir Patrick Spence."

"The Spanish Lady's Love."

"The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn."—MARVELL.

"Goff's Oak."—MOXON.

"Tweed Side."

"Darby and Joan."

"To a Robin Redbreast."

"The Angler's Wish."—WALTON.

"The Milkmaid's Song" (from Walton's *Angler*).—MARLOWE.

"The Milkmaid's Mother's Answer" (from the same).—RALEIGH.

"Christy."—Scotch song.

"The Muse a Consolation."—WITHER.

"Bermudas."—MARVELL.

"Young Love."—MARVELL.

"Go, Lovely Rose."—WALLER.

"To my Young Lady, Lucy Sidney."—WALLER.

In the letter to Procter of January 22nd Lamb draws attention to his fine sonnet in a new manner, one of the best of his later poems, entitled "The Gypsy's Malison," of which he writes more freely a week later:—

"Jan. 29th, 1829.

"When Miss Ouldcroft (who is now Mrs. Beddome, and Bed—dom'd to her!) was at Enfield, which she was in summer-time, and owed her health to its sun and genial influences, she visited (with young lady-like impertinence) a poor man's cottage that had a pretty baby (O the yearnling!), and gave it fine caps and sweetmeats. On a day, broke into the parlour our two maids uproarious. 'O ma'am, who do you think Miss Ouldcroft (they pronounce it Holcroft) has been working a cap for?' 'A child,' answered Mary, in true Shandean female simplicity. 'It's the man's child as was taken up for sheep-stealing.' Miss Ouldcroft was staggered, and would have cut the connection; but by main force I made her go and take her leave of her protégée (which I only spell with a g because I can't make a pretty j). I thought, if she went no more, the Abactor or Abactor's wife (vide Ainsworth) would suppose she had heard something; and I have delicacy for a sheep-stealer. The overseers actually overhauled a mutton-pie at the baker's (his first, last, and only hope of mutton-pie), which he never came to eat, and thence inferred his guilt. *Per occasionem cujus* I framed the sonnet; observe its elaborate construction. I was four days about it.

#### "THE GYPSY'S MALISON

"Suck, baby, suck, Mother's love grows by giving,  
 Drain the sweet founts that only thrive by wasting;  
 Black Manhood comes, when riotous guilty living  
 Hands thee the cup that shall be death in tasting.  
 Kiss, baby, kiss, Mother's lips shine by kisses,  
 Choke the warm breath that else would fall in blessings;  
 Black Manhood comes, when turbulent guilty blisses  
 Tend thee the kiss that poisons 'mid caressings.



Hang, baby, hang! mother's love loves such forces,  
 Choke the fond neck that bends still to thy clinging;  
 Black Manhood comes, when violent lawless courses  
 Leave thee a spectacle in rude air swinging.

So sang a wither'd Sibyl energetical,  
 And bann'd the ungiving door with lips prophetical.

"Barry, study that sonnet. It is curiously and perversely elaborate. 'Tis a choking subject, and therefore the reader is directed to the stricture [strictness] of it. See you? and was this a fourteener to be rejected by a trumpery annual? forsooth, 'twould shock all mothers; and may all mothers, who would so be shocked, be damned! as if mothers were such sort of logicians as to infer the future hanging of *their* child from the theoretical hangibility (or capacity of being hanged, if the judge pleases) of every infant born with a neck on. Oh B. C., my whole heart is faint, and my whole head is sick (how is it?) at this damned, canting, unmasculine age!"

Miss Ouldcroft, it should be explained, was Louisa Holcroft, who had just married Carlyle's Birmingham friend Badams, the chemist. To return to Lamb's first letter to Procter concerning the sonnet (which was printed in *Blackwood* for January, 1829) — "'Twas written for the *Gem*, but the editors declined it, on the plea that it would *shock all mothers*; so they published the 'Widow,' instead.<sup>1</sup> I am born out of time. I have no conjecture about what the present world calls delicacy. I thought *Rosamund Gray* was a pretty modest thing. Hessey assures me that the world would not bear it. I have lived to grow into an indecent character. When my sonnet was rejected, I exclaimed, 'Damn the age! I will write for Antiquity!'"

In April Lamb's spirits were still sufficiently high to send Robinson a mischievous letter congratulating him on his good health and describing the rheumatic pains from which Lamb was suffering—the joke being that Lamb was well and hearty and Robinson in an agony. A day or so later a second letter followed:—

"I do confess to mischief. It was the subtlest diabolical piece of malice, heart of man has contrived. I have no more rheumatism than that poker. Never was freer from all pains and aches. Every joint sound, to the tip of the ear from the extremity of

<sup>1</sup>"The Widow" was a parody of Lamb's style, by Hood, in the *Gem*, 1829.

the lesser toe. The report of thy torments was blown circuitously here from Bury. I could not resist the jeer. I conceived you writhing, when you should just receive my congratulations. How mad you'd be. Well, it is not in my method to inflict pangs. I leave that to heaven. But in the existing pangs of a friend, I have a share. His disquietude crowns my exemption. . . .

"You never was rack'd, was you? I should like an authentic map of those feelings.

"You seem to have the flying gout.

"You can scarcely scruce a smile out of your face—can you? I sit at immunity, and sneer *ad libitum*.

"Tis now the time for you to make good resolutions. I may go on breaking 'em, for any thing the worse I find myself.

"Your Doctor seems to keep you on the long cure. Precipitate healings are never good.

"Don't come while you are so bad. I shan't be able to attend to your throes and the dumbee at once.

"I should like to know how slowly the pain goes off. But don't write, unless the motion will be likely to make your sensibility more exquisite.

"Your affectionate and truly healthy friend C. LAMB.

"Mary thought a Letter from me might amuse you in your torment."

On May 8th Robinson, now recovered, paid his tormentor a visit. His *Diary* has the following entries:—

"May 8th, 1829:—Went by the early coach to Enfield, being on the road from half-past eight till nearly eleven. Lamb was from home a great part of the morning. I spent the whole of the day with L. and his sister, without going out of the house, except for a mile before dinner with Miss Lamb, and the greater part of the day was as usual spent over whist. I had plenty of books to lounge over.

"May 9th:—Nearly the whole day within doors. I merely sunned myself at noon on the beautiful Enfield Green. . . . Of course great part of the time we were at dummy whist and the rest of the day I was looking over a great number of Lamb's [books] of which no small number are curious. He throws away indeed all modern books, but retains the trash he liked when a boy. Looked over a 'Life of Congreve,' one of Curll's infamous publications, containing nothing. The first edition of the 'Rape of

the Lock,' with the machinery. It is curious to observe the improvements in the versification. Colley Cibber's pamphlets against Pope, only flippant and disgusting—nothing worth notice. Read the beginnings of two wretched novels. Lamb and his sister were both in a fidget to-day by the departure of their old servant Becky, who had been with them many years, but, being ill-tempered, had been a plague and a tyrant to them. Yet Miss Lamb was frightened at the idea of a *new* servant. However, their new maid, a cheerful, healthy girl, gave them spirits, and all the next day Lamb was rejoicing at the change. Moxon came very late.

"May 10th:—All the forenoon in the back room with the Lambs, except that I went out to take a place in the evening stage. About noon Talfourd came: he had walked. Moxon, after a long walk, returned also to dinner, and we had an agreeable chat between dinner and tea. At 6 I went back to London on the stage."

Of Becky, for so long the Lambs' servant and tyrant, the chief historian (as of Dash) is Patmore. He writes: "At Islington, and afterwards at Enfield, they had a favourite servant—'Becky.' She was an excellent person in all respects; and not the worse that she had not the happiness of comprehending the difference between genius and common sense,—between 'an author' and an ordinary man. Accordingly, having a real regard for her master and mistress, she used not seldom to take the liberty of telling them 'a bit of her mind,' when they did anything 'odd,' or out of the common way. And as (to do them justice) their whole life and behaviour were as little of a common-place as could well be, Becky had plenty of occasions for the exercise of her self-imposed task, of instructing her master and mistress in the ways of the world! Becky, too, had the advantage of previous experience in observing and treating the vagaries of extraordinary men; for she had lived for some years with Hazlitt before she went to the Lambs. The consequence was, that though, so far as I ever heard or observed, she was never wanting in any one particular of her duties and office, she was very apt to overstep them, and trench on those of her master and mistress. In performing the *métier* of housekeeping, the Lambs were something like an excellent person of my acquaintance, who, when a tradesman brings him home a pair of particularly well-fitting boots, or



any other object perfectionated in a manner that peculiarly takes his fancy, inquires the price, and if it happens to be at all within tradesmanlike bounds, says, 'No; I cannot give you that price, it is too little—I shall give you so and so,'—naming a third or fourth more than the price demanded! Now, if the Lambs' baker, for example, had charged them (as, it is said, bakers will) a dozen loaves in the weekly bill, when they must have known that they had eaten only half that number, the last thing they would have thought of was complaining of the overcharge. If they had not consumed the proper quantity to pay for the trouble of serving them, it was not the baker's fault; and the least they could do was to pay for it!

"Now this was a kind of logic utterly incomprehensible to Becky, and she would not hear of it. Her master and mistress had a right to be as extravagant as they pleased; but they had no right to confound the distinctions between honesty and roguery, and it was what she could not permit. Nor must it be wondered at if she failed to recognise and admit the intellectual pretensions of persons who were evidently so behind the rest of the world in the knowledge of these first rudiments of household duties. Now there are few of us who would not duly prize a domestic with wit and honesty enough to protect us from the consequences of our own carelessness or indifference. But who is there who, like Lamb, without caring one farthing for the advantages he might gain by Becky's blunt honesty, would not merely overlook, but be even pleased and amused by the ineffable airs of superiority which she gave herself, on the strength of her superior genius for going the best way to market? The truth is, that Becky used to take unwarrantable liberties, which every one who visited the Lambs must have observed; though scarcely any could have known, or even guessed at, her grounds for doing so. Yet I never heard a complaint or a harsh word uttered of her, much less *to* her; and I believe there was no inconvenience, privation, or expense, that they would not have put up with, rather than exchange her honest roughness for the servile civility of anybody else.

"I remember a trifling incident, which showed the interest the Lambs took in the welfare of this young woman, whom no one else, had she persisted in treating them personally as she did the Lambs, would have kept in their house a week, though she had been the best servant in the world. Her father, an interest-

ing and excellent old man, had, from his advancing years, been thrown out of his ordinary employment as a porter and warehouseman, and had no means of support, but what his daughter could allow him. During this time he used to be constantly at the Lambs' and they had taken great trouble, and used every means, to get him into some situation; but in vain. At last (for it was quite at an early period of my acquaintance with them) they asked me if I could do anything for him; having, as they said, teased and bored all their other and older friends without success. I happened to have the means of putting him into a comfortable situation almost immediately; and I doubt if this trifling service had not more merit in Lamb's eyes, and did not afford him more real pleasure in bringing it about, than any one of the more important acts of benefit that he had been the medium of performing, for those personal friends in whom he felt an interest.

“At last Becky left them, to be married; and I believe this circumstance, more than anything else, was the cause of their giving up house-keeping; which they did shortly afterwards.”

During May, 1829, Mary Lamb was again taken ill; she was still ill on June 3rd, when Lamb sent Barton news of the death of young Dibdin; and still ill on July 25th, the date of his next and very melancholy letter to the same friend. “I have had the loneliest time near 10 weeks, broken by a short apparition of Emma for her holydays, whose departure only deepened the returning solitude, and by 10 days I have past in Town. But Town, with all my native hankering after it, is not what it was. The streets, the shops are left, but all old friends are gone. And in London I was frightfully convinced of this as I past houses and places—empty caskets now. I have ceased to care almost about any body. The bodies I cared for are in graves, or dispersed. My old Clubs, that lived so long and flourish'd so steadily, are crumbled away. When I took leave of our adopted young friend at Charing Cross, 'twas heavy unfeeling rain, and I had no where to go. Home have I none—and not a sympathising house to turn to in the great city. Never did the waters of the heaven pour down on a forlorn head. Yet I tried 10 days at a sort of a friend's house, but it was large and straggling—one of the individuals of my old long knot of friends, card players, pleasant companions—that have tumbled to pieces into dust and

other things—and I got home on Thursday, convinced that I was better to get home to my hole at Enfield, and hide like a sick cat in my corner.

“Less than a month I hope will bring home Mary. She is at Fulham, looking better in her health than ever, but sadly rambling, and scarce showing any pleasure in seeing me, or curiosity when I should come again. But the old feelings will come back again, and we shall drown old sorrows over a game at Picquet again. But ’tis a tedious cut out of a life of sixty four, to lose twelve or thirteen weeks every year or two. And to make me more alone, our illtemperd maid is gone, who with all her airs, was yet a home piece of furniture, a record of better days; the young thing that has succeeded her is good and attentive, but she is nothing—and I have no one here to talk over old matters with. Scolding and quarreling have something of familiarity and a community of interest—they imply acquaintance—they are of resentment, which is of the family of dearness. I can neither scold nor quarrel at this insignificant implement of household services; she is less than a cat, and just better than a deal Dresser. What I can do, and do overdo, is to walk, but deadly long are the days—these summer all-day days, with but a half hours candlelight and no firelight. . . .

“I pity you for over-work, but I assure you no-work is worse. The mind preys on itself, the most unwholesome food. I brag’d formerly that I could not have too much time. I have a surfeit. With few years to come, the days are wearisome. But weariness is not eternal. Something will shine out to take the load off, that flags me, which is at present intolerable. I have killed an hour or two in this poor scrawl. I am a sanguinary murderer of time, and would kill him inchmeal just now. But the snake is vital. Well, I shall write merrier anon.” (The brag of which Lamb was thinking was probably his sonnet “Leisure” printed in the *London Magazine* for April, 1821:—

They talk of time, and of time’s galling yoke,  
That like a mill stone on man’s mind doth press,  
Which only works and business can redress:  
Of divine Leisure such foul lies are spoke,  
Wounding her fair gifts with calumnious stroke.  
But might I, fed with silent meditation,  
Assoiled live from that fiend Occupation—  
*Improbis Labor*, which my spirit hath broke—  
I’d drink of time’s rich cup, and never surfeit—



Fling in more days than went to make the gem,  
That crowned the white top of Methusalem—  
Yea on my weak neck take, and never forfeit,  
Like Atlas bearing up the dainty sky,  
The heaven-sweet burthen of eternity.)

I do not know who the friend was with whom Lamb stayed in London. Robinson having gone to Rome in June, we have no information. On September 22nd Mary Lamb was at home again, but, as Lamb told Moxon, in "the saddest low spirits that ever poor creature had" and unable to see any one. A month later a note to Gillman tells of the step which the brother and sister believed to be necessary. "We have had a sorry house of it here. Our spirits have been reduced till we were at hope's end what to do. Obligated to quit this house, and afraid to engage another, till in extremity, I took the desperate resolve of kicking house and all down, like Bunyan's pack; and here we are in a new life at board and lodging, with an honest couple our neighbours. We have ridded ourselves of the cares of dirty acres; and the change, though of less than a week, has had the most beneficial effects on Mary already. She looks two years and a half younger for it. But we have had sore trials."

The honest couple were Thomas Westwood and his wife, the parents of the Thomas Westwood whose interesting reminiscences of the Lambs I have already quoted. They lived next door to the Lambs, in a house which still stands, now known as "Westwood Cottage," although it has been much changed externally. The Lambs' sitting-room, leading into the garden, is, however, much as it was. I quote, from the famous letter to Wordsworth of January 22nd, 1830, the description of Gaffer Westwood: "And is it a year since we parted from you at the steps of Edmonton Stage? There are not now the years that there used to be. The tale of the dwindled age of men, reported of successional mankind, is true of the same man only. We do not live a year in a year now. 'Tis a punctum stans. The seasons pass us with indifference. Spring cheers not, nor winter heightens our gloom, Autumn hath foregone its moralities, they are hey-pass re-pass [as] in a show-box. Yet as far as last year occurs back, for they scarce shew a reflex now, they make no memory as heretofore,—'twas sufficiently gloomy. Let the sullen nothing pass.

"Suffice it that after sad spirits prolonged thro' many of its

months, as it called them, we have cast our skins, have taken a farewell of the pompous troublesome trifle call'd housekeeping, and are settled down into poor boarders and lodgers at next door with an old couple, the Baucis and Baucida of dull Enfield. Here we have nothing to do with our victuals but to eat them, with the garden but to see it grow, with the tax gatherer but to hear him knock, with the maid but to hear her scolded. Scot and lot, butcher, baker, are things unknown to us save as spectators of the pageant. We are fed we know not how, quietists, confiding ravens. We have the *otium pro dignitate*, a respectable insignificance. Yet in the self condemned obliviousness, in the stagnation, some molesting yearnings of life, not quite kill'd, rise, prompting me that there was a London, and that I was of that old Jerusalem. In dreams I am in Fleet-market, but I wake and cry to sleep again. I die hard, a stubborn Eloisa in this detestable Paraclete. What have I gained by health? intolerable dulness. What by early hours and moderate meals?—a total blank. O never let the lying poets be believed, who 'tice men from the chearful haunts of streets—or think they mean it not of a country village. In the ruins of Palmyra I could gird myself up to solitude, or muse to the snorings of the Seven Sleepers, but to have a little teasing image of a town about one, country folks that do not look like country folks, shops two yards square—half a dozen apples and two penn'orth of overlookd gingerbread for the lofty fruiterers of Oxford Street—and, for the immortal book and print stalls, a circulating library that stands still, where the shew-picture is a last year's Valentine, and whither the fame of the last ten Scotch novels has not yet travel'd (marry, they just begin to be conscious of the Red Gauntlet), to have a new plasterd flat church, and to be wishing that it was but a Cathedral. The very blackguards here are degenerate. The topping gentry, stock brokers. The passengers too many to ensure your quiet, or let you go about whistling, or gaping—too few to be the fine indifferent pageants of Fleet Street. Confining, room-keeping thickest winter is yet more bearable here than the gaudy months. Among one's books at one's fire by candle one is soothed into an oblivion that one is not in the country, but with the light the green fields return, till I gaze, and in a calenture can plunge myself into Saint Giles's. O let no native Londoner imagine that health, and rest, and in-

nocent occupation, interchange of converse sweet and recreative study, can make the country any thing better than altogether odious and detestable. A garden was the primitive prison till man with promethean felicity and boldness luckily sinn'd himself out of it. Thence followd Babylon, Nineveh, Venice, London, haberdashers, goldsmiths, taverns, playhouses, satires, epigrams, puns—these all came in on the town part, and the thither side of innocence. Man found out inventions. . . .

“Mary must squeeze out a line *propriâ manu*, but indeed her fingers have been incorrigibly nervous to letter writing for a long interval. 'Twill please you all to hear that, tho' I fret like a lion in a net, her present health and spirits are better than they have been for some time past: she is absolutely three years and a half younger, as I tell her, since we have adopted this boarding plan.

“Our providers are an honest pair, dame Westwood and her husband—he, when the light of prosperity shined on them, a moderately thriving haberdasher within Bow Bells, retired since with something under a competence, writes himself parcel gentleman, hath borne parish offices, sings fine old sea songs at three-score and ten, sighs only now and then when he thinks that he has a son on his hands about 15, whom he finds a difficulty in getting out into the world, and then checks a sigh with muttering, as I once heard him prettily, not meaning to be heard, ‘I have married my daughter however,’—takes the weather as it comes, outsides it to town in severest season, and a' winter nights tells old stories not tending to literature, how comfortable to author-rid folks! and has *one anecdote*, upon which and about forty pounds a year he seems to have retired in green old age. It was how he was a *rider* in his youth, travelling for shops, and once (not to baulk his employer's bargain) on a sweltering day in August, rode foaming into Dunstable upon a *mad horse* to the dismay and expostulatory wonderment of innkeepers, ostlers &c. who declared they would not have bestrid the beast to win the Darby. Understand the creature gall'd to death and desperation by gad flies, cormorants winged, worse than beset Inachus daughter. This he tells, this he brindles and burnishes on a' winter's eves, 'tis his star of set glory, his rejuvenescence to descant upon. Far from me be it (*dii avertant*) to look a gift story in the mouth, or cruelly to surmise (as those who doubt the plunge of Curtius) that the inseparate conjuncture of man



and beast, the centaur-phenomenon that staggered all Dunstable, might have been the effect of unromantic necessity, that the horse-part carried the reasoning, willy nilly, that needs must when such a devil drove, that certain spiral configurations in the frame of Thomas Westwood unfriendly to alighting, made the alliance more forcible than voluntary. Let him enjoy his fame for me, nor let me hint a whisper that shall dismount Bellerophon. Put case he was an involuntary martyr, yet if in the fiery conflict he buckled the soul of a constant haberdasher to him, and adopted his flames, let Accident and He share the glory! You would all like Thomas Westwood.



How weak is painting to describe a man! Say that he stands four feet and a nail high by his own yard measure, which like the Sceptre of Agamemnon shall never sprout again, still you have no adequate idea, nor when I tell you that his dear hump, which I have favord in the picture, seems to me of the buffalo—indicative and repository of mild qualities, a budget of kindnesses, still you have not the man. . . .

“Henry Crabb is at Rome, advices to that effect have reach’d Bury. But by solemn legacy he bequeath’d at parting (whether he should live or die) a Turkey of Suffolk to be sent every succeeding Xmas to us and divers other friends. What a genuine old Bachelor’s action! I fear he will find the air of Italy too classic. His station is in the Hartz forest, his soul is *Bego’ethed*. Miss Kelly we never see; Talfourd not this half-year; the latter flourishes, but the exact number of his children, God forgive me, I have utterly forgotten, we single people are often out in our count there. Shall I say two? One darling I know they have lost within a twelvemonth, but scarce known to me by sight, and that was a second child lost. We see scarce anybody. We have just now Emma with us for her holydays: you remember her playing at brag with Mr. Quillinan at poor Monkhouse’s! She is grown an agreeable young woman; she sees what I write so you may understand me with limitations. She was our inmate for a twelvemonth, grew natural to us, and then they told

us it was best for her to go out as a Governess, and so she went out, and we were only two of us, and our pleasant house-mate is changed to an occasional visitor. If they want my sister to go out (as they call it) there will be only one of us. Heaven keep us all from this acceding to Unity!"

For a while the Westwoods' house seemed to solve the problem, but later, as we shall see, the Lambs became dissatisfied and made yet another and final move. Mrs. Jenkins, the present owner of Westwood Cottage, is delighted to show visitors over the house. Since Lamb's day it has been enlarged by the absorption of a stable and loft, and the addition of a bay window; but the Lambs' two sitting-rooms are practically as they were, and the garden has a now crazy summer-house which must have been there in their day. Standing on the little lawn one can see the very window of the next house through which, it is possible, Lamb projected his presentation copies. The white house opposite Westwood's, in which a sick lady lay for so long (as mentioned in one of the letters), has not been touched since that day. The Enfield Greyhound, however, where the Cowden Clarkes and others of Lamb's friends lodged, is now no more, but the Crown and Horseshoe on Chase Side, whence Lamb sometimes fetched a jug for an unexpected visitor, is where it always was, on the bank of the New River.

Two other letters may be quoted before 1829 closes. Talfourd had named a child Charles Lamb Talfourd, and had apprised Lamb of the circumstance. The name-father replied, "You could not have told me of a more friendly thing than you have been doing. I am proud of my namesake. I shall take care never to do any dirty action, pick pockets, or anyhow get myself hanged, for fear of reflecting ignominy upon your young Chrisom. I have now a motive to be good. I shall not *omnis moriar*;—my name borne down the black gulf of oblivion. I shall survive in eleven letters, five more than Cæsar. Possibly I shall come to be knighted, or more! Sir C. L. Talfourd, Bart.! Yet hath it an authorish twang with it, which will wear out my name for poetry. Give him a smile from me till I see him." The little boy, however, lived only to be six years old. On the other hand, Charles Lamb Kenney, a son of James Kenney, who was born in 1821, lived to be sixty.

Writing to Barton on December 8th Lamb was moved, half, I

imagine, in earnest, and half in fun, to this outburst: "I will tell you honestly B. B. that it has been long my deliberate judgment, that all Bankrupts, of what denomination civil or religious whatever, ought to be hang'd. The pity of mankind has for ages run in a wrong channel, and has been diverted from poor Creditors (how many I have known sufferers! Hazlitt has just been defrauded of £100 by his Bookseller-friend's breaking<sup>1</sup>) to scoundrel Debtors. I know all the topics, that distress may come upon an honest man without his fault, that the failure of one that he trusted was his calamity &c. &c. Then let *both* be hang'd. O how careful it would make traders! These are my deliberate thoughts after many years' experience in matters of trade. What a world of trouble it would save you, if Friend \* \* \* \* \* had been immediately hang'd, without benefit of clergy, which (being a Quaker I presume) he could not reasonably insist upon. Why, after slaving twelve months in your assign-business, you will be enabled to declare seven pence in the Pound in all human probability. B. B., he should be *hanged*. Trade will never re-flourish in this land till such a Law is establish'd."

In this year an edition of Lamb's poems, bound up with those of Rogers, Campbell, James Montgomery and Kirke White, was published by A. & W. Galignani in Paris. It consisted of the poems in the *Works*, with seven additional pieces collected from the magazines. I do not know who was responsible for this edition, which was preceded by a very friendly introduction—possibly Patmore.

In this year also Lamb departed so far from his ordinary apathetic state regarding Affairs as, I think, to assist his neighbour Sergeant Wilde (afterwards Lord Truro) in his election campaign at Newark. Two at least of the squibs in which Wilde's opponent was ridiculed seem to have traces of Lamb's hand in them.<sup>2</sup> His participation in so alien a fray was due to Martin Burney, who acted as Wilde's assistant. In spite of such a powerful political ally the Sergeant was defeated.

<sup>1</sup> Hunt & Clarke, the publishers of his *Life of Napoleon*.

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. V. of my edition of Lamb's writings, page 341.



## CHAPTER XLVIII

1830-1831

London Calling—Emma Isola's Illness—Visit to Fornham—Genial Excesses and Genial Excuses—A Plea for Home—*Album Verses* Published—Jerdan's Attack—Southey's Rally—Other Hostile Critics—A London Experiment—"Free Thoughts on Some Eminent Composers"—The Death of Hazlitt—Mary Lamb Ill Again—George Dyer's Blindness—Wordsworth's Sugar—Coleridge's Pension—*The Englishman's Magazine*—Lamb and Unitarianism—Robinson at Enfield—Thomas Carlyle at Enfield—Truth for Truth's Sake—Lamb and Scotchmen.

IN 1830 two or three events occurred to take Lamb a little out of himself—the illness of Miss Isola in the spring, the publication of *Album Verses* and a sojourn in London in the summer, and the death of Hazlitt in September.

In the long letter to Wordsworth of January 22nd, the first of the year, Lamb says, "Under his [Westwood's] roof now ought I to take my rest, but that back-looking ambition tells me I might yet be a Londoner. Well, if we ever do move, we have encumbrances the less to impede us: all our furniture has faded under the auctioneer's hammer, going for nothing like the tarnish'd frippery of the prodigal, and we have only a spoon or two left to bless us. Clothed we came into Enfield, and naked we must go out of it. I would live in London shirtless, bookless." In Mary Lamb's postscript to the same letter, addressed to Dorothy Wordsworth, we read, "I never go to town, nor my brother but at his quarterly visits at the India House, and when he does, he finds it melancholy, so many of our old friends being dead or dispersed, and the very streets, he says altering every day. . . . If you knew how happy your letters made us you would write I know more frequently. Pray think of this. How cheerfully should we pay the postage *any week*."

Writing to Barton on February 25th Lamb repeats his old complaint of the inanity of country life. "Let me congratulate

you on the Spring coming in, and do you in return condole with me for the Winter going out. When the old one goes, seldom comes a better. I dread the prospect of Summer, with his all day long days. No need of his assistance to make country places dull. With fire and candle light, I can dream myself in Holborn. With lightsome skies shining in to bed time, I can not. This Meseck and these tents of Kedar—I would dwell in the skirts of Jericho rather, and think every blast of the coming in Mail a Ram's Horn. Give me old London at Fire and Plague times, rather than these tepid gales, healthy country air, and purposeless exercise."

It is in this letter that he makes the remark which his biographers have to keep continually in the background of the mind, "The more my character comes to be known, the less my veracity will come to be suspected."

On the same or the next day came news from Fornham of the illness of Miss Isola—an attack of brain fever—very distressing to Lamb. On March 1st he replies to a letter containing better news, "You would forgive me for my nonsense if you knew how light-hearted you have made two poor souls at Enfield, that were gasping for news of their poor friend. . . . We are happier than we hardly know how to bear." Writing again to Mrs. Williams on March 22nd he announces his intention of travelling to Fornham on the following Monday to bring Miss Isola home. The visit was made, and on April 2nd he tells Mrs. Williams of their safe arrival at home, in one of the best of his later letters. "I have great pleasure in letting you know that Miss Isola has suffered very little from fatigue on her long journey. I am ashamed to say that I came home rather the more tired of the two. But I am a very unpractised traveller. . . . We found my Sister very well in health, only a little impatient to see her; and, after a few hysterical tears for gladness, all was comfortable again. We arrived here from Epping between five and six.

"The incidents of our journey were trifling, but you bade me tell them. We had then in the coach a rather talkative Gentleman, but very civil, all the way, and took up a servant maid at Stamford, going to a sick mistress. . . . The *former* engaged me in a discourse for full twenty miles on the probable advantages of Steam Carriages, which being merely problematical, I bore my part in with some credit, in spite of my totally un-engineer-like faculties. But when somewhere about Stanstead he put an

unfortunate question to me as to the 'probability of its turning out a good turnip season;' and when I, who am still less of an agriculturist than a steam-philosopher, not knowing a turnip from a potato ground, innocently made answer that I believed it depended very much upon boiled legs of mutton, my unlucky reply set Miss Isola a laughing to a degree that disturbed her tranquility for the only moment in our journey. I am afraid my credit sank very low with my other fellow-traveller, who had thought he had met with a *well-informed passenger*, which is an accident so desirable in a Stage Coach. We were rather less communicative, but still friendly, the rest of the way."

Some acrostics enclosed in this letter produced a reply acrostic, presumably on Lamb's name, from Mrs. Williams. In acknowledging it Lamb writes very happily: "I do assure you that your verses gratified me very much, and my sister is quite *proud* of them. For the first time in my life I congratulated myself upon the shortness and meanness of my name. Had it been Schwartzenberg or Esterhazy, it would have put you to some puzzle. I am afraid I shall sicken you of acrostics; but this last was written *to order*. I beg you to have inserted in your county paper something like this advertisement. 'To the nobility, gentry, and others, about Bury.—C. Lamb respectfully informs his friends and the public in general, that he is leaving off business in the acrostic line, as he is going into an entirely new line. Rebuses and Charades done as usual, and upon the old terms. Also, Epitaphs to suit the memory of any person deceased.'" The letter has this pleasant postscript in the old manner: "*P.S.*—I am the worst folder-up of a letter in the world, except certain Hottentots, in the land of Caffre, who never fold up their letters at all, writing very badly upon skins, &c."

To the same period probably belongs a very characteristic little note to the Enfield doctor concerning some medicine addressed by mistake to Miss Isola Lamb: "No such person is known on the Chase Side, and she is fearful of taking medicines which may have been made up for another patient. She begs me to say that she was born an *Isola* and christened *Emma*. Moreover that she is Italian by birth, and that her ancestors were from Isola Bella (Fair Island) in the kingdom of Naples. She has never changed her name and rather mournfully adds



that she has no prospect at present of doing so. She is literally I. SOLA, or single, at present. Therefore she begs that the obnoxious monosyllable may be omitted on future Phials,—an innocent syllable enough, you'll say, but she has no claim to it. It is the bitterest pill of the seven you have sent her. When a lady loses her good *name*, what is to become of her? Well she must swallow it as well as she can, but begs the dose may not be repeated."

To the same doctor—Jacob Vale Asbury<sup>1</sup>—was written one of Lamb's most amusing letters of penitence for a last night's indiscretion, belonging probably to the present year. It begins: "It is an observation of a wise man that 'moderation is best in all things.' I cannot agree with him 'in liquor.' There is a smoothness and oiliness in wine that makes it go down by a natural channel, which I am positive was made for that descending. Else, why does not wine choke us? could Nature have made that sloping lane, not to facilitate the down-going? She does nothing in vain. You know that better than I. You know how often she has helped you at a dead lift, and how much better entitled she is to a fee than yourself sometimes, when you carry off the credit. Still there is something due to manners and customs, and I should apologise to you and Mrs. Asbury for being absolutely carried home upon a man's shoulders thro' Silver Street, up Parson's Lane, by the Chapels (which might have taught me better), and then to be deposited like a dead log at Gaffar Westwood's, who it seems does not 'insure' against intoxication. Not that the mode of conveyance is objectionable. On the contrary, it is more easy than a one-horse chaise. Ariel in the 'Tempest' says

On a Bat's back do I fly, after sunset merrily.

Now I take it that Ariel must sometimes have stayed out late of nights. Indeed, he pretends that 'where the bee sucks, there lurks he,' as much as to say that his suction is as innocent as that little innocent (but damnably stinging when he is provok'd) winged creature. But I take it, that Ariel was fond of metheglin, of which the Bees are notorious Brewers."

One other letter in a similar vein, provoked by a similar lapse, has been preserved; it is to Cary, and though it belongs to a somewhat later date it is more fitting to allude to it here.

<sup>1</sup> Lamb thought his name James, as an extant acrostic proves.

Lamb, on one of his monthly visits to Cary at the British Museum, in 1834, had been a little overcome. "I protest I know not in what words to invest my sense of the shameful violation of hospitality, which I was guilty of on that fatal Wednesday. Let it be blotted from the calendar. Had it been committed at a layman's house, say a merchant's or manufacturer's, a cheesemonger's or greengrocer's, or, to go higher, a barrister's, a member of Parliament's, a rich banker's, I should have felt alleviation, a drop of self-pity. But to be seen deliberately to go out of the house of a clergyman drunk! a clergyman of the Church of England too! not that alone, but of an expounder of that dark Italian Hierophant, an exposition little short of *his* who dared unfold the Apocalypse: divine riddles both; and (without supernal grace vouchsafed) Arks not to be fingered without present blasting to the touchers. And, then, from what house! Not a common glebe or vicarage (which yet had been shameful), but from a kingly repository of sciences, human and divine, with the primate of England for its guardian, arrayed in public majesty, from which the profane vulgar are bid fly. Could all those volumes have taught me nothing better!"

A glimpse of Lamb in his cups is given by Mrs. Procter in a letter to Mrs. Jameson in 1830 or thereabouts. "Charles Lamb," she writes (from 25 Bedford Square), "dined here on Monday at 5, and by seven he was so tipsy he could not stand. Martin Burney carried him from one room to the other like a sack of coals, he insisting on saying 'Diddle diddle dumpty, my son John'—he slept until 10, and then awoke more tipsy than before—and between his fits of bantering Martin Burney, kept saying, 'Please God I'll never enter this cursed house again.' He wrote a note next day begging pardon and asking when he may come again. Poor Miss Lamb is ill."

The late Mr. Dykes Campbell sent Mrs. Procter, fifty-six years later, a copy of this letter, when the original was sold by auction, and drew from that wise and witty lady a pleasant reply, in which she remarked: "I could not help laughing when I read your extract. I have entirely forgotten the dinner. If people will dine at 5 what can be expected? We have no time to get tipsy now, and that is our excuse."

A letter to Ayrton on March 14th revives old times at the

Burneys: "the old Captain's significant nod over the right shoulder (was it not?); Mrs. Burney's determined questioning of the score, after the game was absolutely gone to the devil; the plain but hospitable cold boiled-beef suppers at sideboard: all which fancies, redolent of middle age and strengthful spirits, come across us ever and anon in this vale of deliberate senectitude, ycleped Enfield." The main purpose of the letter was to reply to an offer of John Murray to bring out a revised edition of Lamb's *Dramatic Specimens*. Lamb suggested adding the Garrick extracts from the *Table Book*; but the project, as far as Murray was concerned, fell through, and the book was published in 1835 by Moxon.

In May we find Lamb busy in the interest of William Hone whom, as we have seen, he and some friends had installed in a coffee-house in Gracechurch Street some months before, but who was now again in need of financial help. Southey's influence had been gained by Lamb to pave the way for the opening of a subscription in the *Times*, and on May 21st the following advertisement was inserted. I think the composition is Lamb's.

THE FAMILY OF WILLIAM HONE, in the course of last winter, were kindly assisted by private friends to take and alter the premises they now reside in, No. 13, Gracechurch-street, for the purpose of a coffeehouse, to be managed by Mrs. Hone and her elder daughters: but they are in a painful exigency which increases hourly, and renders a public appeal indispensable. The wellwishers to Mr. Hone throughout the kingdom, especially the gratified readers of his literary productions (in all of which he has long ceased to have an interest, and from none of which can he derive advantage), are earnestly solicited to afford the means of completing the fittings and opening the house in a manner suited to its proposed respectability. If this aid be yielded without loss of time, it will be of indescribable benefit, inasmuch as it will put an end to many grievous anxieties and expenses, inseparable from the lengthened delay which has hitherto been inevitable, and will enable the family to immediately commence the business, which alone they look forward to for support. Subscriptions will be received by the following bankers, &c.

The first subscription list, published on Monday, May 31st, totalled £103. It was headed by £10 from Charles Lamb, Esq., Enfield. On June 10th a further appeal was made. Hone, however, did not prosper, as insufficient capital was raised to be of real service.

In the spring of 1830 Moxon, financed by Samuel Rogers, established himself as a publisher at 64 New Bond Street, and in July he issued his first book: *Album Verses and Other*



*Poems* by Charles Lamb. The little volume had the following dedication :—

TO THE PUBLISHER.

DEAR MOXON,

I do not know to whom a Dedication of these Trifles is more properly due than to yourself. You suggested the printing of them. You were desirous of exhibiting a specimen of the *manner* in which Publications, entrusted to your future care, would appear. With more propriety, perhaps, the "Christmas,"<sup>1</sup> or some other of your own simple, unpretending Compositions, might have served this purpose. But I forget—you have bid a long adieu to the Muses. I had on my hands sundry Copies of Verses written for *Albums*—

Those Books kept by modern young Ladies for show,

Of which their plain grandmothers nothing did know—  
or otherwise floating about in Periodicals; which you have chosen in this manner to embody. I feel little interest in their publication. They are simply—  
*Advertisement Verses.*

It is not for me, nor you, to allude in public to the kindness of our honoured Friend, under whose auspices you are become a Bookseller. May that fine-minded Veteran in Verse enjoy life long enough to see his patronage justified! I venture to predict that your habits of industry, and your cheerful spirit, will carry you through the world.

I am, Dear Moxon,

Your Friend and Sincere Well-wisher,

CHARLES LAMB.

ENFIELD, 1st June, 1830.

With the exception of the lines "On an Infant Dying as Soon as it was Born"<sup>2</sup> and the sonnet "Work,"<sup>3</sup> there was nothing in *Album Verses* of Lamb's highest or most characteristic quality, but it was a very agreeable collection of light poetry. Its author's motives in issuing the volume were, however, cruelly misunderstood by one paper at least, the *Literary Gazette*, edited by William Jerdan. In the number for July 10th, 1830, was printed a contemptuous review containing this passage: "If any thing could prevent our laughing at the present collection of absurdities, it would be a lamentable conviction of the blinding and engrossing nature of vanity. We could forgive the folly of the original composition, but cannot but marvel at the egotism which has preserved, and the conceit which has published." Lamb himself probably was not much disturbed by Jerdan's venom, but

<sup>1</sup> The reference to "Christmas" is to Moxon's poem of that name, published in 1829, and dedicated to Lamb.—The couplet concerning *Albums* is from one of Lamb's own pieces.—The Veteran in Verse was Samuel Rogers, who, then sixty-seven, lived yet another twenty-five years. Moxon published the superb editions of his *Italy* and his *Poems*, illustrated by Turner and Stothard.

<sup>2</sup> See page 577.

<sup>3</sup> See page 493.

Southey took it much to heart, and sent to the *Times* of August 6th, 1830, the following lines in praise of his friend :—

TO CHARLES LAMB

On the Reviewal of his '*Album Verses*' in the *Literary Gazette*

Charles Lamb, to those who know thee justly dear  
 For rarest genius, and for sterling worth,  
 Unchanging friendship, warmth of heart sincere,  
 And wit that never gave an ill thought birth,  
 Nor ever in its sport infix'd a sting;  
 To us who have admired and loved thee long,  
 It is a proud as well as pleasant thing  
 To hear thy good report, now borne along  
 Upon the honest breath of public praise :  
 We know that with the elder sons of song  
 In honouring whom thou hast delighted still,  
 Thy name shall keep its course to after days.  
 The empty pertness, and the vulgar wrong,  
 The flippant folly, the malicious will,  
 Which have assailed thee, now, or heretofore,  
 Find, soon or late, their proper meed of shame ;  
 The more thy triumph, and our pride the more,  
 When witling critics to the world proclaim,  
 In lead, their own dolt incapacity.  
 Matter it is of mirthful memory  
 To think, when thou wert early in the field,  
 How doughtily small Jeffrey ran at thee  
 A-tilt, and broke a bulrush on thy shield.  
 And now, a veteran in the lists of fame,  
 I ween, old Friend! thou art not worse bested  
 When with a maudlin eye and drunken aim  
 Dulness hath thrown a *jerdan* at thy head.

SOUTHEY.

This was Southey's first public utterance concerning Lamb since the famous open letter to him of October, 1823. Lamb wrote to Bernard Barton in the same month : "How noble . . . in R. S. to come forward for an old friend who had treated him so unworthily." For the critics, he added, he did not care the "five hundred thousandth part of a half-farthing."

Leigh Hunt also threw himself into the fray, for Lamb, against the *Literary Gazette*, and the columns of the *Examiner* contained a number of "Rejected Epigrams" (one at least of which was from Lamb's pen), in which Jerdan was attacked, for the most part with little wit and a total absence of delicacy. The following lines are probably Lamb's :—

On English ground I calculated once  
 How many block-heads—taking dunce by dunce—  
 There are *four hundred* (if I don't forget)—  
 The Readers of the *Literary Gazette*.

And these are probably Hunt's:—

#### INQUEST EXTRAORDINARY

Last week a porter died beneath his burden  
 Verdict: Found carrying a *Gazette* from Jerdan.

Jerdan awaited his revenge, and took it when a little volume entitled *Poems by Alfred Tennyson* came his way for review. The circumstance that Moxon was Tennyson's publisher, as well as Lamb's, not improbably had something to do with the gusto with which the lashes were laid on. Thus:—

Mr. Alfred Tennyson may be considered a pupil of a poetical school, to offer a fair and candid opinion of the merits and demerits of any one of whom, from the Dux of the highest to the Dunce of the lowest form, is sure to bring the whole about your ears, buzzing, hollooming, yelping, abusing, and pelting, with all the fury of an incensed urchinry. We had a taste of this about a year and a half ago (July 30th, 1830), when we humbly ventured to question the infinite beauty and excellence of *Album Verses* by C. Lamb (*L. G.*, No. 703). This collection of pretty slipslop, which could not have obtained partial applause at a tea-party, we said was unworthy of publication for general reading; and we regretted that vanity and egotism should have led the amiable writer into the weakness of suffering it to go forth to the world. This offence provoked the unmitigated rage of the school referred to, which, for want of a fitter name, we shall call the BAA-LAMB SCHOOL; and they hastened to pour out all their impotence upon us.

Blame and praise are thereafter mixed, the sum of the matter being that "Low diet and sound advice may restore the patient; in the meantime we must commit him to what his publication does not deserve to have—a cell." When, however, the *Last Essays of Elia* came out in 1833 the *Literary Gazette* (not without consciousness of its magnanimity) had nothing but good to say of the book.

Jerdan's paper was not alone in its reception of *Album Verses*. An even more malignant article was printed in the *Monthly Review*. The writer begins thus:—

Some few years ago, there was in this metropolis a little coterie of half-bred men, who took up poetry and literature as a trade, and who, having access to one or two Sunday newspapers, and now and then to the magazines and reviews, puffed off each other as the first writers of the day. The public, who are always easily deluded by bold pretenders, took no trouble to inquire into the real merits of these much praised individuals; they read on every thing that was offered.



whether in verse or prose, and, for aught that we know, joined in the chorus of eulogy that was poured upon the authors from the land of Cockaigne. Among these was Leigh Hunt, Mr. Procter, better known under the namby-pamby title of Barry Cornwall, Mr. Hazlitt, some half a dozen others whose names we forget, and Mr. Charles Lamb, the inditer of the precious verses now before us. . . .

It is pleasant to reflect, that we have assisted, by our labours and opinions, to accelerate the extinction of all this gossamer tribe of literati, or at least that we have lived to witness their disappearance, one by one, from the temple into which they intruded. Their buzz is silenced. Their painted wings have lost all their pretty colour. Even their slender skeletons are gone, utterly perished. But, unhappily, as the maid whose duty it is to banish from our mansions every mischief-working insect, being about to sit down with a light heart and a merry song on her lip, imagining her work to be finished, happens sometimes to be startled from her quietude by the sudden revival of a moth or a spider, whose death she hoped she had sufficiently compassed, so do we feel surprised at the reappearance of Charles Lamb! Poor fellow, he looks more like a ghost than any thing human or divine. His verses partake of the same character. They exhibit the fleeting, shadowy reflections of thoughts that, in their best days, were blessed with a very slender portion of substance.

I have no guess as to the writer of this indictment; but it is clear from the close of the passage just quoted that he knew something of Lamb and his history. A further idea of his incapacity to understand his author is offered by the remark, in a furious onslaught on the rhymed letter to Bernard Barton: "But here everything is bad. The taste of presenting a coloured print to a Quaker is atrocious in the first place."

The real object of these attacks was, I fancy, less Lamb than Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. Hazlitt, of course, was disliked, while Leigh Hunt, with all his gaiety and kindliness, had many enemies, who were not averse from wounding him through his friends, or his friends through him. It must, however, be remembered that although Lamb had always suffered a little through his friendships—the *Anti-Jacobin* whipping him on Coleridge and Lloyd's back, the *Quarterly* on Hazlitt's, *Blackwood* on "Cockney" Hunt's—yet he had probably in conversation said many caustic things about many of the London reviewers, which, having been repeated, had not been forgotten. Reviewers have never been more than human.

For what reason we do not know—possibly the summer days had become too long and trying—the Lambs determined in July upon a bold step. They left Enfield and took lodgings at 34 (or 24) Southampton Buildings, a house kept by the Misses Buffam. How long Lamb remained I cannot exactly discover—possibly till early in November—but while there he was in poor health

and his sister became once again seriously ill. We have a glimpse of him in a letter from Mrs. Aders to Crabb Robinson on September 5th: "Lamb dined with us last Monday. We talked much of you, and the affection he expressed for you did our hearts good . . . He has been writing a little book of Album verses, the book bearing that title, in which is introduced the exquisitely beautiful poem written on the drawing in my Album [*'Angel Help'*]. He published the new book to make known a young man of the name of Moxon, who has been established in business as a bookseller and publisher by Rogers. . . . Lamb sent us a copy of his, which the reviewers have cut up most unmercifully, and in return Lamb has cut up them and Southey has written a beautiful sonnet in praise of the book and satirising the reviewers."

The best letter of 1830, after that to Wordsworth from which I have quoted above, is to Sarah Hazlitt on May 24th, which relates again the story of the turnip crop and boiled legs of mutton; and contains the description of Martin Burney quoted in Chapter XX., and the following passage: "Ayrton was here yesterday, and as *learned* to the full as my fellow-traveller. What a pity that he will spoil a wit and a devilish pleasant fellow (as he is) by wisdom! He talk'd on Music; and by having read Hawkins and Burney recently I was enabled to talk of Names, and show more knowledge than he had suspected I possessed; and in the end he begg'd me to shape my thoughts upon paper, which I did after he was gone, and sent him.

"FREE THOUGHTS ON SOME EMINENT COMPOSERS

Some cry up Haydn, some Mozart,  
 Just as the whim bites. For my part,  
 I do not care a farthing candle  
 For either of them, or for Handel.  
 Cannot a man live free and easy,  
 Without admiring Pergolesi!  
 Or thro' the world with comfort go  
 That never heard of Doctor Blow!  
 So help me God, I hardly have;  
 And yet I eat, and drink, and shave,  
 Like other people, (if you watch it,)  
 And know no more of stave and crotchet  
 Than did the un-Spaniardised Peruvians;  
 Or those old ante-queer-Diluvians  
 That lived in the unwash'd world with Jubal,  
 Before that dirty Blacksmith Tubal,

By stroke on anvil, or by summ'at,  
 Found out, to his great surprise, the gamut.  
 I care no more for Cimerosa  
 Than he did for Salvator Rosa,  
 Being no Painter; and bad luck  
 Be mine, if I can bear that Gluck!  
 Old Tycho Brahe and modern Herschel  
 Had something in them; but who's Purcel?  
 The devil, with his foot so cloven,  
 For aught I care, may take Beethoven;  
 And, if the bargain does not suit,  
 I'll throw him Weber in to boot!  
 There's not the splitting of a splinter  
 To chuse 'twixt *him last named*, and Winter.  
 Of Doctor Pepusch old queen Dido  
 Knew just as much, God knows, as I do.  
 I would not go four miles to visit  
 Sebastian Bach—or Batch—which is it?  
 No more I would for Bononcini.  
 As for Novello and Rossini,  
 I shall not say a word about [to grieve] 'em,  
 Because they're living. So I leave 'em."

Lamb's story of the origin of these verses is not necessarily correct. I fancy that he had written them for Novello before he produced them in reply to Ayrton's challenge. When sending the poem to Ayrton in a letter at this time, he said that it was written to gratify Novello. Mary Lamb (or possibly Charles Lamb, personating her), appended the following postscript to the verses in Novello's album:—

The reason why my brother's so severe,  
 Vincentio, is—my brother has no *ear*:  
 And Caradori her mellifluous throat  
 Might stretch in vain to make him learn a note.  
 Of common tunes he knows not anything,  
 Nor "Rule, Britannia" from "God save the King."  
 He rail at Handel! He the gamut quiz!  
 I'd lay my life he knows not what it is.  
 His spite at music is a pretty whim—  
 He loves not it, because it loves not him.

It was during the Lambs' sojourn in London—on September 18th—that another blow came to them with the death of William Hazlitt.

There is no record of Hazlitt having visited Enfield; or indeed, since his return from the Continent in October, 1825, of having resumed any of his old intimacy with the Lambs. But Lamb lived so much in the past that Hazlitt's death must have seemed



like the breaking of a present friendship. Since his return (without the second Mrs. Hazlitt, who left him finally in Switzerland,) he had been busy on his *Life of Napoleon*, his *Conversations with Northcote*, and work for the periodicals. During this time he had moved about between London and Winterslow Hut, living in London in Down Street, in Half Moon Street, in Bouverie Street and finally at 6 Frith Street, Soho, and it was at the last lodging that he was taken ill and died. He was fifty-five years of age. "Well, I've had a happy life," were his last words.

Lamb, White (Edward White of the East India House), Hessey, the publisher, and William Hazlitt the younger were at his bedside. Lamb, says Talfourd, "joined a few friends in attending his funeral in the churchyard of St. Anne's, Soho, where he was interred, and felt his loss—not so violently at the time, as mournfully in the frequent recurrence of the sense that a chief source of intellectual pleasure was stopped."

On October 9th Lamb again made his will, leaving everything to Talfourd and Ryle of the East India House in trust for his sister for her life, the reversion to go to Emma Isola. This means that the previous will, possibly never completed, in which Allsop, Talfourd and Procter were executors, was destroyed.

A letter to Moxon on November 12th describes the end of the London experiment: "I have brought my sister to Enfield, being sure that she had no hope of recovery in London. Her state of mind is deplorable beyond any example. I almost fear whether she has strength at her time of life ever to get out of it. Here she must be nursed, and neither see nor hear of anything in the world out of her sick chamber. The mere hearing that Southey had called at our lodgings totally upset her. Pray see him, or hear of him at Mr. Rickman's, and excuse my not writing to him. I dare not write or receive a letter in her presence; every little task so agitates her."

Lamb, however, seems to have settled down again to work—probably stimulated by his re-entry into the literary arena with the *Album Verses*—and during his sister's illness he composed the comic ballad *Satan in Search of a Wife*, issued anonymously by Moxon in 1831. In an undated letter to Moxon, which belongs I think to the end of the year, Lamb says that Mary Lamb is again well and Emma Isola with them.

There are few letters belonging to 1831, and since Robinson was still abroad our knowledge of the Lambs is small; but we may suppose that life was a little easier with them. The return of Lamb to essay-writing, to assist Moxon's *Englishman's Magazine*, was very good for him while it lasted. The duration of the work was all too brief.

On February 22nd we have our last glimpse of George Dyer, now an old man very near total blindness. From Lamb's letter to him of that date I have quoted passages in Chapters V. and XIV.; he says also, in his best vein of half-humorous kindness, "You are many films removed yet from Milton's calamity. You write perfectly intelligibly. Marry, the letters are not all of the same size or tallness; but that only shows your proficiency in the *hands*—text, german-hand, court-hand, sometimes law-hand, and affords variety. You pen better than you did a twelvemonth ago; and if you continue to improve, you bid fair to win the golden pen which is the prize at your young gentlemen's academy. But you must beware of Valpy, and his printing-house, that hazy cave of Trophonius, out of which it was a mercy that you escaped with a glimmer. Beware of MSS. and Variæ Lectiones. Settle the text for once in your mind, and stick to it. You have some years' good sight in you yet, if you do not tamper with it. It is not for you (for *us* I should say) to go poring into Greek contractions, and star-gazing upon slim Hebrew points. We have yet the sight

Of sun, and moon, and star, throughout the year,  
And man and woman.

You have vision enough to discern Mrs. Dyer from the other comely gentlewoman who lives up at staircase No. 5; or, if you should make a blunder in the twilight, Mrs. Dyer has too much good sense to be jealous for a mere effect of imperfect optics. But don't try to write the Lord's Prayer, Creed, and Ten Commandments, in the compass of a halfpenny; nor run after a midge or a mote to catch it; and leave off hunting for needles in bushels of hay, for all these things strain the eyes. The snow is six feet deep in some parts here. I must put on jack-boots to get at the post-office with this. It is not good for weak eyes to pore upon snow too much. It lies in drifts. I wonder what its drift is; only that it makes good pancakes, remind Mrs. Dyer. It turns a pretty green world into a white one. It glares too



IN LEIGH HUNT'S STUDY

FROM A DRAWING, FROM MEMORY, BY THOMAS LEIGH HUNT

From the collection of Mrs. Norton, New York





much for an innocent colour, methinks. I wonder why you think I dislike gilt edges. They set off a letter marvellously. Yours, for instance, looks for all the world like a tablet of curious *hieroglyphics* in a gold frame. But don't go and lay this to your eyes. You always wrote hieroglyphically, yet not to come up to the mystical notations and conjuring characters of Dr. Parr."

On April 13th Lamb tells Cary that he is daily expecting Wordsworth, and a message from Mary Lamb indicates that she is well. Of Wordsworth's visit when it was made (and of the Westwoods) we have a glimpse in Patmore's recollections of Lamb. The Lambs, he says, paid their landlord and landlady "a price almost sufficient to keep all the household twice over, but where, nevertheless, they were expected to pay for every extra cup of tea, or any other refreshment, they might offer to any occasional visitor. Lamb soon found out the mistake he had made in connecting himself with these people, and did not fail to philosophise (to his friends) on their blind stupidity, in thus risking what was almost their sole means of support, in order to screw an extra shilling out of his easy temper. But he endured it patiently nevertheless. One circumstance I remember his telling me with great glee, which was evidently unmixed with any anger or annoyance at the cupidity of these people, but only at its blindness. Wordsworth and another friend had just been down to see them, and had taken tea; and in the next week's bill *one* of the extra 'teas' was charged an extra sixpence, and on Lamb's inquiring what this meant, the reply was, that 'the elderly gentleman,' meaning Wordsworth, 'had taken such a quantity of sugar in his tea.'"

After April 13th there are two comic letters in Latin, to Barton and Cary, and on July 14th a very interesting communication to Moxon concerning Coleridge, on whose behalf Lamb was exerting himself. "About 8 days before you told me of R.'s [Rogers'] interview with the Premier, I, at the desire of Badams, wrote a letter to him (Badams)<sup>1</sup> in the most moving terms setting forth the age, infirmities &c. of Coleridge. This letter was convey'd to [by] B. to his friend Mr. Ellice of the Treasury, Brother in Law to Lord Grey, who immediately pass'd

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle's friend, the chemist, who married Louisa Holcroft, daughter of Thomas Holcroft and stepdaughter of Kenney.

it on [to] Lord Grey, who assured him of immediate relief by a grant on the King's Bounty, which news E. communicated to B with a desire to confer with me on the subject, on which I went up to THE Treasury (yesterday fortnight) and was received by the Great Man with the utmost cordiality, (shook hands with me coming and going) a fine hearty Gentleman, and, as seeming willing to relieve any anxiety from me, promised me an answer thro' Badams in 2 or 3 days at farthest. Meantime Gilman's extraordinary insolent letter comes out in the Times! As to *my* acquiescing in this strange step, I told Mr. Ellice (who expressly said that the thing was renewable three-yearly) that I consider'd such a grant as almost equivalent to the lost pension, as from C.'s appearance and the representations of the Gilman's, I scarce could think C.'s life worth 2 years' purchase. I did not know that the Chancellor had been previously applied to. Well, after seeing Ellice I wrote in the most urgent manner to the Gilmans, insisting on an immediate letter of acknowledgment from Coleridge, or them *in his name* to Badams, who not knowing C. had come forward so disinterestedly amidst his complicated illnesses and embarrassments, to *use up* an interest, which he may so well need, in favor of a stranger; and from that day not a letter has B. or even myself, received from Highgate, unless *that publish'd one in the Times is meant as a general answer to all the friends who have stirr'd to do C. service!* Poor C. is not to blame, for he is in leading strings. I particularly wish you would read this part of my note to Mr. Rogers."

The explanation of the foregoing portion of the letter is best given in the words of Coleridge's closest student. "On June 3, 1830," writes Dykes Campbell in his memoir of Coleridge, "died George IV., and with him died the pensions of the Royal Associates. Apparently they did not find this out until the following year. In the *Englishman's Magazine* for June, 1831, attention was directed to the fact that 'intimation had been given to Mr. Coleridge and his brother Associates that they must expect their allowances "very shortly" to cease'—the allowances having been a personal bounty of the late King. On June 3, 1831, Gillman wrote a letter to the *Times*, 'in consequence of a paragraph which appeared in the *Times* of this day.' He states that on the sudden suppression of the honorarium, representations on Coleridge's behalf were made to Lord Brougham,



with the result that the Treasury (Lord Grey) offered a private grant of £200, which Coleridge 'had felt it his duty most respectfully to decline.' Stuart, however, wrote to King William's son, the Earl of Munster, pointing out the hardship entailed on Coleridge, 'who is old and infirm, and without other means of subsistence.' He begs the Earl to lay the matter before his royal father. To this a reply came, excusing the King on account of his 'very reduced income,' but promising that the matter shall be laid before His Majesty. To these letters, which are printed in *Letters from the Lake Poets*, the following note is appended: 'The annuity . . . was not renewed, but a sum of £300 was ultimately handed over to Coleridge by the Treasury.' Even apart from this bounty, Coleridge was not a sufferer by the withdrawal of the King's pension, for Frere made it up to him annually."

It was only with the publication of Lamb's letter that his share in Coleridge's fortunes was discovered.

Lamb must have been again very busy at this time in preparing his contributions to the *Englishman's Magazine*, which Moxon had acquired in time to be responsible for the August issue. To that number Lamb sent his reminiscences of Elliston. In the September number he had his rather cruel but very diverting account of George Dawe, the painter, from which I have quoted in Chapter XXII., and in October the essay on "Newspapers Thirty-Five Years Ago," from which I have quoted in Chapter XVIII., wherein we see again, after five years of silence, almost the true Elia. Both these papers were part of a series called "Peter's Net," with the motto "All is fish that comes to my net." Lamb also reviewed his own *Album Verses*, in the guise of a eulogy of Vincent Bourne. In a letter to Moxon in August, enclosing the paper on Dawe, Lamb refers to Edward FitzGerald's "Meadows in Spring" (which the *Athenæum*, when reprinting it from Hone's *Year Book*, had thought to be by Lamb himself) as "exquisite poetry," and one of the two pieces—Montgomery's "Common Lot" is the other—the writers of which he envied.

On September 13th, writing to William Hazlitt the younger, promising some verses on Hazlitt to be printed in his *Life* (which however, if written, have vanished), Lamb says that they have a sick house. But as, writing on September 23rd, Mrs. Aders tells Crabb Robinson that the Lambs are now well, we must suppose

the illness to have been unimportant. With the October number the *Englishman's Magazine* came to an end, so suddenly that the news found Lamb in the midst of a new article for it, the essay on the "Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art." Moxon's capital was, I imagine, too small to permit of further risks being run.

I quote from Lamb's letter replying to the intimation that the magazine was no more, premising that the Devil's money refers to profits on *Satan in Search of a Wife*. "To address an abdicated monarch is a nice point of breeding. To give him his lost titles is to mock him; to withhold 'em is to wound him. But his Minister who falls with him may be gracefully sympathetic. I do honestly feel for your diminution of honors, and regret even the pleasing cares which are part and parcel of greatness. Your magnanimous submission, and the cheerful tone of your renunciation, in a Letter which, without flattery, would have made an 'ARTICLE,' and which, rarely as I keep letters, shall be preserved, comfort me a little. Will it please, or plague you, to say that when your parcel came I damned it, for my pen was warming in my hand at a ludicrous description of a Landscape of an R.A., which I calculated upon sending you to-morrow, the last day you gave me. Now any one calling in, or a letter coming, puts an end to my writing for the day. Little did I think that the mandate had gone out, so destructive to my occupation, so relieving to the apprehensions of the whole body of R.A.'s. So you see I had not quitted the ship while a plank was remaining.

"To drop metaphors, I am sure you have done wisely. The very spirit of your epistle speaks that you have a weight off your mind. I have one on mine. The cash in hand which, as \* \* \* \* \* less truly says, burns in my pocket. I feel queer at returning it (who does not?). You feel awkward at retaking it (who ought not?) Is there no middle way of adjusting this fine embarrassment. I think I have hit upon a medium to skin the sore place over, if not quite to heal it. You hinted that there might be something under £10 by and by accruing to me *Devil's Money*. You are sanguine—say £7: 10s.—that I entirely renounce and abjure all future interest in, I insist upon it, and 'by Him I will not name' I won't touch a penny of it. That will split your Loss one half—and leave me conscientious possessor of what I hold. Less than your assent to this, no proposal will I

accept of. . . . If I write much more I shall expand into an article, which I cannot afford to let you have so cheap.

“By the by, to shew the perverseness of human will—while I thought I *must* furnish one of those accursed things monthly, it seemed a Labour above Hercules’s ‘Twelve’ in a year, which were evidently Monthly Contributions. Now I am emancipated, I feel as if I had a thousand Essays swelling within me. False feelings both. . . .

“Your ex-Lampoonist, or Lamb-punnist—from Enfield, Oct. 24, or ‘last day but one for receiving articles that can be inserted.’”

In the same letter Lamb says: “Did G. D. send his penny tract to me to convert me to Unitarianism? Dear blundering soul! why I am as old a one-Goddite as himself.” That Lamb as a young man was a convinced Unitarian we have seen; but when he contributed to the *London Magazine*, in 1825, a serious remonstrance with Unitarians for their weakness and inconsistency in allowing themselves to make use of the Established churches for marriage ceremonies and salving their consciences with a “protest,” he wrote as an independent critic of all sects. We cannot suppose him to have been for the second half of his life anything more than a well-wishing sympathiser with Unitarian tenets. Among the stories told of him is one of a sudden outburst against the Unitarians for robbing him of “two-thirds of his God.” Coleridge had become positively hostile to the sect. Emerson describes a visit to Highgate in 1833 during which the old mystic did little but fulminate to his American guest against Unitarianism.

On October 16th—to go back a few days—Crabb Robinson, now in England again after a long sojourn in Rome and elsewhere, gives an account of a visit to Enfield:—

“October 16th, 1831:—Breakfasted at home, and late, so that it was between one and two when I reached Lamb, having rode on the stage to Edmonton, and walked thence to Enfield. I found Lamb and his sister boarding with the Westwoods—good people, who, I dare say, take care of them. At least the women, for W. is an old man and invalid and seems nearly in his dotage. Mrs. W. seems active and kind. Lamb has rendered himself their benefactor by getting a place for their son in Aders’ counting-house. They return his services by attentions which he and his sister want, but it is deplorable that he should be reduced to such



a state that he has none to associate with but the very lowest of people in attainments. No wonder that he seems very discontented. Both he and Miss L. looked somewhat older, but not more than all do almost whom I have closely noticed since my return. They were heartily glad to see me as it seemed. After dinner, I was anxious to leave them before it was dark, and the Lambs accompanied me between 4 and 5 o'clock, but they walked only a short time with me."

On November 2nd of this year Lamb received the famous visit from Thomas Carlyle that resulted in an entry in the philosopher's *Diary* which were it not so instructive every one would wish blotted. Carlyle was within a month of his thirty-sixth birthday, Lamb was nearly fifty-seven. Carlyle was at the beginning of a career of impatience and omniscience, Lamb near the end of a life of uncomplaining unselfishness. The young Scotchman, master of himself, servant of Truth for Truth's sake, with eyes alert for insincerity, weakness, frivolity and other deadly sins, wasted the afternoon of November 2nd by travelling to Enfield and back. His *Diary* received the record of the fruitless journey, set down with a pitying self-satisfied pen:—

"November 2:—How few people speak for Truth's sake, even in its humblest modes! I return from Enfield, where I have seen Lamb, &c. &c. Not one of that class will tell you a straightforward story or even a credible one about any matter under the sun. All must be packed up into epigrammatic contrasts, startling exaggerations, claptraps that will get a plaudit from the galleries! I have heard a hundred anecdotes about William Hazlitt for example; yet cannot by never so much cross-questioning even form to myself the smallest notion of how it really stood with him. Wearisome, inexpressibly wearisome to me is that sort of clatter; it is not walking (to the end of time you would never advance, for these persons indeed have no WHITHER); it is not bounding and frisking in graceful, natural joy; it is dancing—a St. Vitus's dance. Heigh ho!

"Charles Lamb I sincerely believe to be in some considerable degree insane. A more pitiful, ricketty, gasping, staggering, stammering Tomfool I do not know. He is witty by denying truisms and abjuring good manners. His speech wriggles hither and thither with an incessant painful fluctuation, not an opinion in it, or a fact, or a phrase that you can thank him for —

more like a convulsion fit than a natural systole and diastole. Besides, he is now a confirmed, shameless drunkard; *asks* vehemently for gin and water in strangers' houses, tipples till he is utterly mad, and is only not thrown out of doors because he is too much despised for taking such trouble with him. Poor Lamb! Poor England, when such a despicable abortion is named genius! He said 'There are just two things I regret in England's history: first, that Guy Fawkes' plot did not take effect (there would have been so glorious an *explosion*); second, that the Royalists did not hang Milton (then we might have laughed at them), &c. &c.' *Armer Teufel!*"

The history of misunderstanding has few things better than this. I like to think of the poor broken-down Cockney sizing-up his visitor in a twinkling and deciding to give him exactly what he merited. It is one of our literary tragedies that Lamb's record of the visit is not also preserved, but there is a passage in a Cockney essay called "Imperfect Sympathies" which has some anticipatory bearing upon November 2nd, 1831: "I have been trying all my life to like Scotchmen, and am obliged to desist from the experiment in despair. They cannot like me—and in truth, I never knew one of that nation who attempted to do it. There is something more plain and ingenuous in their mode of proceeding. We know one another at first sight." Lamb then goes on to describe his own imperfect intellect, in the words which I have quoted on page 455.

He continues: "The brain of a true Caledonian (if I am not mistaken) is constituted upon quite a different plan. His Minerva is born in panoply. You are never admitted to see his ideas in their growth—if, indeed, they do grow, and are not rather put together upon principles of clock-work. You never catch his mind in an undress. He never hints or suggests anything, but unlades his stock of ideas in perfect order and completeness. He brings his total wealth into company, and gravely unpacks it. His riches are always about him. He never stoops to catch a glittering something in your presence, to share it with you, before he quite knows whether it be true touch or not. You cannot cry *halves* to anything that he finds. He does not find, but bring. You never witness his first apprehension of a thing. His understanding is always at its meridian—you never see the first dawn, the early streaks.—He has no falterings of self-suspicion."

Such men as Lamb are born to be misunderstood by such men as Carlyle. Carlyle, for all his inspiration and inability to be mistaken, had his imperfect sympathies too. But it is a matter for everlasting regret that his antipathy was so blinding on that November afternoon at Enfield, because otherwise, instead of a misleading caricature in gall, we might have had one of those faithful etched portraits which none could make so well as he. Yet Carlyle is the ultimate sufferer; it was Carlyle who failed and not Lamb. Carlyle, who never dared to be wrong, had been in the presence of a great man, even a hero (whom he made it his special business always to detect and commend), and had failed to recognise him; Lamb, who made no pretensions, had been in the presence of a Scotch irreconcilable and had known it instantly.

Lamb probably suffered much from false estimates; but never was he so gladly and coarsely misunderstood as by his visitor of November 2nd, 1831. Where Carlyle gathered his information as to Lamb's hopeless drunkenness I cannot say: obviously not from personal experience on that afternoon; but every one who is accustomed to hear gossip, literary or otherwise, knows how easily in conversation the occasional vagary of an absentee is exalted into a habit, and a habit into a besetting vice. London was not less thoroughly furnished then than now with tattlers who knew all.<sup>1</sup>

The entry in the *Diary* was not all. In conversation with one who spoke of Lamb's humour, Carlyle denied him the possession of any such gift. "It was only a thin streak of Cockney wit. I have known scores of Scotch moorland farmers, who, for humour, would have blown Lamb into the zenith." And more than thirty years later than the entry in the *Diary*, after the publication of both of Talfourd's books, Carlyle returned to the attack, in his *Reminiscences*:—

<sup>1</sup> I ought here to quote the following extract from an article on Lamb in the *British Quarterly Review* for May, 1848, the author of which evidently wrote with knowledge; but I do not consider that the story at all justifies Carlyle. Philosophers must be above provocation; they must see below the surface:—"While on this subject, and because, like the former anecdotes, it has not been made public, we may relate the story of his first meeting with Thomas Carlyle. Lamb was never partial to the Scotch, and on this evening he was more than usually offensive in his remarks on their character; but when supper appeared, and a bowl of porridge was placed before Carlyle, Lamb's jokes and remarks upon it were so insulting as almost to lead to an open quarrel. Even Lamb's friend, from whom we had the story, could say nothing in his justification; his behaviour was wantonly offensive."



“Charles Lamb and his Sister came daily, once or oftener [to Badams’ house at Enfield]; a very sorry pair of phenomena. Insuperable proclivity to *gin*, in poor old Lamb. His talk contemptibly small, indicating wondrous ignorance and shallowness, even when it was serious and good-mannered, which it seldom was; usually *ill*-mannered (to a degree), screwed into frosty artificialities, ghastly make-believe of wit;—in fact more like ‘diluted insanity’ (as I defined it) than anything of real jocosity, “humour,” or geniality. A most slender fibre of actual worth in that poor Charles, abundantly recognisable to me as to others, in his better times and moods; but he was Cockney to the marrow; and Cockneydom, shouting, ‘Glorious, marvellous, unparalleled in Nature!’ all his days, had quite bewildered his poor head, and churned nearly all the sense out of the poor man. He was the *leanest* of mankind, tiny black breeches buttoned to the kneecap and no further, surmounting spindle legs also in black, face and head fineish, black, bony, lean, and of a Jew type rather; in the eyes a kind of *smoky* brightness or confused sharpness; spoke with a stutter; in walking tottered and shuffled; emblem of imbecility bodily and spiritual (something of real *insanity* I have understood), and yet something too of humane, ingenuous, pathetic, sportfully much-enduring.”

These words, which break off just as their author seems to have been about to write in a manner more worthy of his genius, were set down shortly before the publication of Procter’s memoir of Lamb, in 1866. Let us remember rather Carlyle’s letter to Procter after reading that book: “I have been reading your book on Charles Lamb, in the solitary silent regions whither I had fled for a few days of dialogue with Mother Earth and her elements; I have found in your work something so touching, brave, serene, and pious, that I cannot but write you one brief word of recognition—which I know you will receive with welcome; all the more as I especially *forbid* you to bother yourself with answering it.

“Brevity, perspicuity, graceful clearness; then also perfect veracity, gentleness, lovingness, justness, peaceable candour throughout, a fine kindly sincerity to all comers, with sharp enough insight too, quick recognition graphically rendered—all the qualities, in short, which such a book could have, I find visible in this.”

## CHAPTER XLIX

1832-1833

A Bad Beginning to 1832—Recovery—A Bad Pun—Lamb at Crabb Robinson's—"Christopher North" at Enfield—Walter Savage Landor at Enfield—"Rose Aylmer"—Death of Mrs. Reynolds—*The Reflector*—Mistaken for a Murderer—*The Last Essays of Elia*—Moxon's Sonnets—And Recollections of Lamb—His Engagement to Emma Isola—Enfield Exchanged for Edmonton—The Lambs at Edmonton—Emma Isola's Watch—The Wedding—"Thoughts on Presents of Game"—A Calamity of Authorship.

**B**ETWEEN October, 1831, and April, 1832, there are but two notes. I imagine that Mary Lamb was again ill for a great part of this time, for on January 12th, 1832, Robinson has this sinister entry: "Met Kenney at the Athenæum. He gave me a very melancholy account of Ch. Lamb, which looks like the approach of that catastrophe which every one must fear. His anti-social feeling is quite disease. I am afraid of going down to him." A little later, however, Lamb was sufficiently himself again to send to the *Athenæum* newspaper a final tribute to the genius of Munden, who had died on February 6th; and early in March Robinson was able to tell Dorothy Wordsworth that he had heard good accounts of the Lambs from Moxon.

On March 8th he has this entry:—

"I walked to Enfield, and found the Lambs in excellent state, —not in high health, but, what is far better, quiet and cheerful. Miss Isola being there, I could not sleep in the house; but I had a comfortable bed at the inn, and I had a very pleasant evening at whist. Lamb was very chatty, and altogether as I could wish.

"March 9:—Breakfasted with Lamb, and after breakfast we had several good rubbers of whist together. And playing twice, did not leave off till one. I afterwards sat alone with Miss L. till near two."

On March 26th Lamb had tea with Robinson at the Temple, and afterwards they went together to Cary's. We see him

again in London in May. John Payne Collier, in his *Old Man's Diary*, records, under the date May 15th, 1832, that he went to dinner at W. Harness's to meet Mary Russell Mitford, and others "In the evening, the Lambs joined the party, and Charles was joked about the charming young Quakeress who had lived in the same street in Pentonville where Lamb had lodged: she generally wore white, and somebody present called her 'a white witch.' 'No' (said Lamb), 'if a witch at all, as she lived at *the last house* in our street, she must be the Witch of *End-door*.'"

On Saturday, May 26th, Robinson dined at Talfourd's to meet Lamb and Miss Isola. He writes: "May 27, Sunday:—Before I arose C. Lamb was thundering at my door. He had slept with his clothes on all night and came out not knowing what to do with himself. I persuaded him to breakfast with me, thinking that at least as an object of curiosity my friends would be glad of the incident. Quayle and Paynter breakfasted with me, and Strutt also stepped down, and we had a desultory chat till past 11 with L. who made himself as agreeable as he could, but I suspect he disappointed my party.

"May 28:—I was reading Boccaccio when Lamb was again at my door. He however did not stay, but I made a cup of coffee for him. He had slept at Talfourd's again with his clothes on. Yet in the midst of this half crazy irregularity he was so full of sensibility that speaking of his sister he had tears in his eyes. And he talked about his favourite poems with his usual warmth, praising Andrew Marvell extravagantly."

On July 11th Lamb had a new visitor, "Christopher North;" but no record of their meeting remains beyond the circumstance that during a long walk they entered an inn together and Lamb was delighted to find that the great Scotchman liked porter too. With Christopher North were Alexander Blair and Moxon.

Wilson wrote of Lamb in 1833: "Charles Lamb ought really not to abuse Scotland in the pleasant way he so often does in the sylvan glades of Enfield; for Scotland loves Charles Lamb; but he is wayward and wilful in his wisdom, and conceits that many a cockney is a better man even than Christopher North. But what will not Christopher forgive to genius and goodness! Even Lamb, bleating libels on his native land. Nay, he learns lessons of humanity even from the mild malice of Elia, and breathes a blessing on him and his household in their bower of rest." Coleridge re-



marked of this sentiment that it was very sweet, and gratified him much.

On July 13th Robinson writes to Dorothy Wordsworth, "Poor Mary Lamb is again ill. Charles was lately in town—in very good bodily health." On the 23rd Robinson returned the visit:—

"July 23rd:—I set off and walked to Enfield to see Charles Lamb. I had a delightful walk, reading Goethe's 'Winckelmann.' I reached Lamb at the lucky moment before tea—he was with Miss Isola. After tea he and I took a pleasant walk together. He was in excellent health and in tolerable spirits. He spoke of his sister with composure. She is now in confinement, but he says she suffers nothing. It is only before and after she entirely loses her mind that she is very wretched and suffers grievously. L. was to-night quite eloquent in praise of Miss Isola. He says she is the most sensible girl and best female talker he knows; he wants to see her well married, great as the loss would be to him. I sat up chatting with L. till past 11 o'clock, and I slept at his house—or rather at the Westwoods'. By the bye, I find he does not like either the old man or his wife, a circumstance very annoying in his dependant state.

"July 24th:—I read Goethe in bed. I was, however, summoned to breakfast at eight, and after breakfast read some Italian with Miss Isola, whom Lamb is teaching Italian without knowing the language himself. I then walked with C. Lamb and Miss I. We would have gone to the Badams', but they were gone out."

We now come to the visit from Landor, whom Robinson took to Enfield on September 28th, 1832. Writing to Landor on October 20th, 1831, he had said: "I have just seen Charles and Mary Lamb living in absolute solitude at Enfield. I found your poems lying open before Lamb. Both tipsy and sober he is ever muttering 'Rose Aylmer.'<sup>1</sup> But it is not those lines only that have a curious fascination for him. He is always turning to 'Gebir' for things that haunt him in the same way." (Landor,

<sup>1</sup> Ah! what avails the sceptred race!

Ah! what the form divine!

What every virtue, every grace!

Rose Aylmer, all were thine.

Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes

May weep, but never see,

A night of memories and of sighs

I consecrate to thee

replying on November 2nd, 1831, remarked, "Wonderful that Charles Lamb should like the poem of mine which I wrote while cleaning my teeth before going to bed. However the night of sorrow was really devoted to the object.")

I quote again from Robinson's *Diary*:—

"September 28th:—Landor breakfasted with me, and also Worsley,<sup>1</sup> who came to supply Hare's place. After an agreeable chat, we drove down to Edmonton, and walked over the fields to Enfield, where Charles Lamb and his sister were ready dressed to receive us. We had scarcely an hour to chat with them; but it was enough to make both Landor and Worsley express themselves afterwards delighted with the person of Mary Lamb; and pleased with the conversation of Lamb, though I thought L. by no means at his ease. Miss Lamb quite silent. Nothing in the conversation recollectable. Lamb gave Landor White's *Falstaff's Letters*. Emma Isola just showed herself. Landor pleased with her, and has since written verses on her."

Landor, whose age was almost identical with Lamb's—he was eleven days older, but he lived thirty years longer—wrote these lines in memory of his hour's visit:—

Once, and once only, have I seen thy face,  
 Elia! once only has thy tripping tongue  
 Run o'er my breast, yet never has been left  
 Impression on it stronger or more sweet.  
 Cordial old man! what youth was in thy years,  
 What wisdom in thy levity, what truth  
 In every utterance of that purest soul!  
 Few are the spirits of the glorified  
 I'd spring to earlier at the gate of Heaven.

In sending an earlier version to Lady Blessington in 1835, Landor remarked, "I say *tripping* tongue, for Charles Lamb stammered and spoke hurriedly. He did not think it worth while to put on a fine new coat to come down and see me in, as poor Coleridge did, but met me as if I had been a friend of twenty years' standing; indeed, he told me I had been so, and shewed me some things I had written much longer ago, and had utterly forgotten. The world will never see again two such delightful volumes as 'The Essays of Elia;' no man living is capable of writing the worst twenty pages of them. The Continent has Zadig and Gil Blas, we have Elia and Sir Roger de Coverley."

<sup>1</sup>Worsley, a friend of Crabb Robinson, was a partner in Whitbread's brewery.

During his visit Landor was asked to contribute a poem to Emma Isola's album, and shortly afterwards he sent these verses :—

## TO EMMA ISOLA

Etrurian domes, Pelasgian walls,  
Live fountains, with their nymphs around  
Terraced and citron-scented halls,  
Skies smiling upon sacred ground—

The giant Alps, averse to France,  
Point with impatient pride to those,  
Calling the Briton to advance,  
Amid eternal rocks and snows—

I dare not bid him stay behind,  
I dare not tell him where to see  
The fairest form, the purest mind,  
Ausonia! that e'er sprang from thee.

Lamb acknowledged the poem in this letter :—

"DEAR Sir, pray accept a little volume. 'Tis a legacy from Elia, you'll see. Silver and Gold had he none, but such as he had, left he you. I do not know how to thank you for attending to my request about the Album. I thought you would never remember it. Are not you proud and thankful, Emma?"

"Yes, *very, both*—

"EMMA ISOLA.

Many things I had to say to you, which there was not time for. *One* why should I forget? 'tis for Rose Aylmer, which has a charm I cannot explain. I lived upon it for weeks.—

"Next I forgot to tell you I knew all your Welch annoyancers, the measureless Beethams. I knew a quarter of a mile of them. 17 brothers and 16 sisters, as they appear to me in memory. There was one of them that used to fix his long legs on my fender, and tell a story of a shark, every night, endless, immortal. How have I grudged the salt sea ravener not having had his gorge of him!

"The shortest of the daughters measured 5 foot eleven without her shoes. Well, some day we may confer about them. But they were tall. Surely I have discover'd the longitude—

"Sir, If you can spare a moment, I should be happy to hear from you—that rogue Robinson detained your verses, till I call'd for them. Don't entrust a bit of prose to the rogue, but believe me

"Your obliged

C. L."



In an undated letter to Moxon, which belongs, I fancy, to the end of 1832, Lamb tells of the death of Mrs. Reynolds, his old schoolmistress, adding that, by thus ceasing to need her allowance, she has "virtually at least bequeath'd me a legacy of £32 per Ann." He adds, "my other pensioner [Morgan, I suppose : see page 423] is safe housed in the Workhouse, which gets me £10." He is thus "richer by both legacies £42 per ann.—For a loss of a loss is as good as a gain of a gain."

In late November or early December Moxon had again become the proprietor of a periodical, the *Reflector*, a weekly paper of which John Forster, then a young man in his twenty-first year, was the editor. Lamb's article on the "Barrenness of Imagination," which he had begun for the *Englishman's Magazine*, was to be printed in the new venture; but once again Moxon seems to have miscalculated the cost, and the *Reflector* was given up after three numbers, before Lamb's luckless paper can have proceeded very far. It was eventually printed in full in the *Athenæum*. Writing to Moxon concerning the *Reflector*, Lamb says, "This is my notion. Wait till you are able to throw away a round sum (say £1500) upon a speculation, and then—don't do it." All trace of the *Reflector* has disappeared.

On December 31st, in a curious letter to Louisa Badams, Lamb tells her how he has been suspected of complicity in the murder of Mr. Danby at Enfield on December 19th, through having been seen in the company of the murdered man and the murderers at the Crown and Horseshoe, whither he had gone to get some porter for Moxon's supper. The story is considered to be one of Lamb's inventions; but it might easily be true. Country policemen will suspect anybody.

At the beginning of 1833 was issued Lamb's last book—*The Last Essays of Elia*. The publication led to a little difficulty with John Taylor, of Taylor & Hessey, who seems to have set up a claim of copyright in the essays that had appeared in the *London Magazine*. His claim was resisted by Moxon, and apparently came to nothing; but in a letter to Procter, published in his *Autobiographical Fragment*, there is the suggestion that Lamb himself offered to meet Taylor's demand, although quite aware of its illegality. That he was not allowed to do so we know from the circumstance that Taylor and Moxon were at law later in the year. Moxon ultimately won. In his correspondence with

Moxon on the subject, Lamb incidentally remarks that *Elia*, in volume form, brought him in £30 profit, but he never succeeded in getting the money.

Copies of the *Last Essays* were sent to Coleridge, Barton, Manning (at Sir George Tuthill's, Cavendish Square), Landor and to Wordsworth, who liked best "Old China" and "The Wedding." The volume, although it contains such beautiful things as "Blakesmoor in H——shire," "Old China" and "Barbara S——," and such admirable pieces of humour as "Captain Jackson" and "Amicus Redivivus," was even less likely to be popular than its predecessor. And its price—nine shillings—was rather high.

Writing to Louisa Badams on February 15th Lamb says that Emma Isola, Mary and himself have "got thro' the Inferno with the help of Cary—and Mary is in for it: she is commencing Tasso." In the same month he congratulates Talfourd on becoming a Serjeant; and there is a note to Charles Wentworth Dilke, containing the sonnet to Edith Southey entitled "Christian Names of Women," which was printed in the *Athenæum* on March 9th. In one of the several brief undated notes to Dilke, belonging to this period, Lamb asks for the loan of some books. "Dog's leaves ensured! Any light stuff: no natural history or useful learning, such as Pyramids, Catacombs, Giraffes, Adventures in Southern Africa, &c. &c. . . . Novels for the last two years, or further back—nonsense of any period."

In a letter to Moxon on March 30th, 1833, we have, I think, the first hint of the little romance that was to rob the Lambs of their adopted daughter. "Mary and E.," says Lamb, "do not dream of anything we have discussed." I imagine the passage to refer to Moxon's avowal of his love for Miss Isola. In a very short time, as we shall see, he was an accepted suitor. He had just moved to new premises in Dover Street, and had once more become an author, with a little collection of sonnets; which were reviewed, almost certainly by Lamb, in the *Athenæum* of April 13th. These sonnets, with additions, were three years later issued again, in two parts, one dated 1830 and the other 1835. The love sonnets of the first part cannot, I think, refer to Miss Isola; but those of the second part undoubtedly do. I quote two which are happy in expression:—

By classic Cam a lovely flow'ret grew.  
 The sun scarce shone upon its tender birth  
 Ere it was left, the loneliest thing on earth,  
 An orphan bent by every wind that blew.  
 And yet the summer fields in all their pride  
 And lustiness of beauty, could compare  
 No gem with this. Fairest of all things fair  
 Was she whose sole endeavour was to hide  
 Her brightness from the day; nor fawn more gay  
 Or sportive, in its liviest mood could be  
 Than this flower, rejoicing in the glee  
 Of its own nature. Thitherward one day  
 Walking perchance, the lovely gem I spied,  
 And from that moment sought it for my Bride!

FAIR art thou as the morning, my young Bride!  
 Her freshness is about thee; like a river  
 To the sea gliding with sweet murmur ever  
 Thou sportest; and, wherever thou dost glide,  
 Humanity a livelier aspect wears.  
 Fair art thou as the morning of that land  
 Where Tuscan breezes in his youth have fanned  
 The grandsire oft. Thou hast not many tears,  
 Save such as pity from the heart will wring,  
 And then there is a smile in thy distress!  
 Meeker thou art than lily of the spring,  
 Yet is thy nature full of nobleness!  
 And gentle ways, that soothe and raise me so,  
 That henceforth I no worldly sorrow know!

We may suppose these sonnets to have been written in 1833. Later, Moxon wrote two sonnets on Charles Lamb, which though they belong more fittingly to the close of this story I should like to quote here:—

HERE sleeps beneath this bank, where daisies grow,  
 The kindest sprite earth holds within her breast;  
 In such a spot I would this frame should rest,  
 When I to join my friend far hence shall go.  
 His only mate is now the minstrel lark  
 Who chaunts her morning music o'er his bed,  
 Save she who comes each evening, ere the bark  
 Of watch-dog gathers drowsy folds, to shed  
 A sister's tears. Kind Heaven, upon her head  
 Do thou in dove-like guise thy spirit pour,  
 And in her aged path some flow'rets spread  
 Of earthly joy, should Time for her in store  
 Have weary days and nights, ere she shall greet  
 Him whom she longs in Paradise to meet.



RECEIVE him to thy arms, melodious shade !  
 Thou know'st his worth, for round one fountain ye  
 Together play'd, green wreaths of poesy  
 Twining for your young brows that shall not fade.  
 Few were your summers, when your reverend pile,  
 Rear'd by good Edward, youthful king, whose dress  
 Marks still the Christ-boy 'mong the crowds that press  
 Round holy Paul's, you entered with a smile !  
 Methinks I see you 'neath those cloisters grey  
 Conning apart some Bard of elder days,  
 Spenser perchance, or Chaucer's pilgrim lay ;  
 Or doth La Mancha's Knight your wonder raise ?  
 Methinks I see you as of old ye sate  
 Within those walls with studious brows elate !

Moxon wrote well of Lamb also in prose, in 1835. I quote certain passages: "He was an admirable Critic, and was always willing to exercise the art he so much excelled in for the fame of others. We have seen him almost blind with poring over the endless and illegible Manuscripts that were submitted to him. On these occasions, how he would long to find out something good, something that he could speak kindly of; for to give another pain (as he writes in a letter now before us) was to give himself greater. [Mary Lamb made the same remark many years before in a letter to Miss Betham.]

"His tastes, in many respects, were most singular. He preferred Wardour Street and Seven Dials to fields that were Elysian. The disappearance of the old clock from St. Dunstan's church drew tears from him; nor could he ever pass without emotion the place where Exeter Change once stood. The removal had spoilt a reality in Gay. The Passer-by, he said, no longer saw 'the combs dangle in his face.' . . . The Garden of Eden, he used to say, must have been a dull place. He had a strong aversion to roast beef and to fowls, and to any wines but port and sherry. Tripe and cow-heel were to him delicacies—rare dainties!

"All his books were without portraits; nor did he ever preserve, with two exceptions, a single letter.<sup>1</sup> He had a humorous method of testing the friendship of his visitors; it was, whether in their walks with him they would taste the tap of mine Host at the Horse-Shoe, or at the Rose and Crown, or at the Rising Sun! But a member of the Temperance Society, on these

<sup>1</sup> A slight exaggeration. He had preserved many of Manning's, which were returned to their writer.

occasions, could not have been more abstemious. A single glass would suffice. We have seen ladies enter with him—the fastidious ‘Barbara S. ;’ and great Poets—the Author of the *Excursion* himself ! He was no politician, though, in his youth, he once assisted to draw through the streets Charles James Fox !

“Nor was he a man of business. He could not pack up a trunk, nor tie up a parcel. Yet he was methodical, punctual in his appointments, and an excellent pay-master. A debt haunted him ! He could not live in another person’s books ! He wished to leave a friend a small sum of money ; but ‘to have done with the thing,’ as he said, gave it him before-hand ! If an acquaintance dropped in of an evening before supper, he would instantly, without saying a word, put on his hat, and go and order an extra supply of porter. He has done this for us a hundred times ! Relics and Keepsakes had no charm for him ! A traveller once brought him some acorns from an Ilex that grew over the Tomb of Virgil. He threw them at the Hackney Coachmen as they passed by his window !<sup>1</sup> And there is a story, that he once sat to an artist of his acquaintance for a whole series of the British Admirals ; but for what publication we never heard !” This book would be a discovery indeed. I have failed to find it.

Crabb Robinson was at Enfield on April 9th, 1833. He writes : ‘April 9th :—I reached the Lambs at tea-time. I found them unusually well in health, but not comfortable. They seemed dissatisfied with their landlord and landlady ; and they have sold all their furniture, so that [they] seem obliged to remain lodgers. I spent the evening playing whist ; and after L. and his sister went to bed, I read in his album (Holcroft’s ‘Travels’ pasted with extracts in MS. and clippings out of newspapers, &c.). Lamb says that he can write acrostics and album verses, and such things, at request, with a facility that approaches that of the Italian *Improvvisatori* ; but that he has great difficulty in composing a poem or prose writing that he himself wishes should be excellent. The things that cost nothing are worth nothing. He says he should be happy had he some literary task. Hayward has sent

<sup>1</sup> In Messrs. Hallward & Hill’s school edition of *Elia* I find the following interesting commentary upon this incident : “It would almost seem that the dead were, in a sense, alive to him, and that he resented anything that interfered with this fancy.”

him his 'Faust.' He thinks it well done, but he thinks nothing of the original. How inferior to Marlowe's play! One scene of that is worth the whole! What has Margaret to do with Faust? Marlowe makes Faust, after the original story, possess Helen of Greece!!!<sup>1</sup>

"April 10:—I read in bed all sorts of things. Looked into Tennyson's poems. They seem to have fancy but nothing else. We played three rubbers of whist after breakfast. I left them after one."

In April Lamb was busy upon a prologue and epilogue for Sheridan Knowles's comedy "The Wife: A Tale of Mantua," produced on April 24th. On the 25th he writes to Moxon in a way that suggests that the engagement was now formally arranged: "We desire to have you here dining un-Westwooded, and I will try and get you a bottle of choice port. I have transferred the stock I told you [of] to Emma;" but the dinner had to be postponed owing to a visitation of influenza to the Westwood cottage. The old man, says Lamb, was all but dying.

Mary Lamb seems to have passed from influenza to her usual malady and to have been moved to Mr. Walden's in Church Street, Edmonton, where she had been nursed before; and her brother on this occasion followed her. It was their last move together.

Writing to Wordsworth at the end of May, Lamb says: "I am emancipated from most *hated* and *detestable* people, the Westwoods. I am with attentive people, and younger.—I am 3 or 4 miles nearer the Great City, Coaches half-price less, and going always, of which I will avail myself. I have few friends left there, one or two tho' most beloved. But London Streets and faces cheer me inexpressibly, tho' of the latter not one known one were remaining."

Earlier in the same letter he writes, concerning his troubles: 'To lay a little more load on it, a circumstance has happen'd, *cujus pars magna fui*, and which at another crisis I should have more rejoiced in. I am about to lose my old and only walk-companion, whose mirthful spirits were the 'youth of our house,' Emma Isola. I have her here now for a little while, but she is too nervous properly to be under such a roof, so she will make short visits, be no more an inmate. With my perfect

<sup>1</sup> See the letter to Harrison Ainsworth of Dec. 9th, 1823.



approval, and more than concurrence, she is to be wedded to Moxon at the end of Aug<sup>st</sup>. So ‘perish the roses and the flowers’<sup>1</sup>—how is it?”

It is now too late, unless one had very extraordinary fortune, to meet with any one who can remember the brother and sister at Edmonton; but in 1875 a few persons were living who had a little to tell, and the substance of their recollections was contributed to the *Globe* under the title “Charles Lamb at Edmonton.” Of the Waldens Mr. H. F. Cox the writer learned little that was new: they “made their living by keeping in gentle restraint those whose attacks were harmless or intermittent, and whose friends looked for more humane treatment than was obtainable in the asylums of those days. Mr. Walden had some professional qualifications for his task, having been, or then being, a keeper at a neighbouring ‘Bethlehem.’ Mr. and Mrs. Walden died on the same day, and are buried in Edmonton churchyard, where Charles and Mary Lamb lie.

“Nearly opposite the cottage,” says the writer, “and the first object on which Lamb’s eye would rest as he pushed at the high iron gate that shut in his strip of garden—stands a charity school for girls, ‘a structure of hope, founded in faith, on the basis of charity, 1784,’ as a legend on the wall testifies. The mistress of this little school, still living in a hale old age, was often drawn to the window by Lamb’s cheery voice as he issued from Mr. Walden’s, chatting loudly with any one he used to meet. He would accost passers-by, she says, and walk and talk with them down the street. Otherwise he was not noticeable, except as a spare, middle-sized man, in pantaloons. Mary Lamb would sometimes but not often, be seen in the street alone. The reputation of insanity attaches, in the schoolmistress’s mind, to the brother as well as the sister. . . . Mr. Walden’s was, no doubt, regarded with curiosity and even awe by the charity girls of those times, as the abode of certain strange individuals who came and went not entirely at their own will, and did odd things when left alone. The schoolmistress, perhaps, sharing this feeling, may have exaggerated Charles Lamb’s eccentricities from the fact that he was brave enough and loving enough to follow his sister into the Walden’s Asylum.”

In October, 1878, Mr. Cox wrote on the same subject in the

<sup>1</sup> *The Excursion*, vii., 98o.

*Dublin University Magazine*, when he added that there was a tradition in Edmonton that Lamb was very kind to the poor and was in the habit of visiting the old people in the alms-houses.

Walden Cottage, or Lamb's Cottage as it is now called, close to Lower Edmonton station, has hardly received the addition of a tin-tack since Lamb's day. Mr. Judd, the present occupier, is courteously willing to show the rooms, which are larger than one might suppose from a view of the front, as the house ramifies considerably at the back. I imagine Lamb's sitting-room to have



Lamb's Last Home—at Edmonton, 1833-1834.

been, as at Mr. Westwood's, on the ground floor, looking on the garden. To get to the Bell at Edmonton—his morning walk—Lamb would turn to the left on passing through the gate. The adjacent inn by the church has been refronted since his day, and a bar now takes the place of the old entrance to the stables; but otherwise it is the same.

In June—his sister being still ill—Lamb writes to Mary Betham, sister of his old friend Matilda, to acknowledge a little legacy of £30 left to Mary Lamb by another sister Anne Betham

Writing to Moxon on July 14th he says that he is just off to Widford to see Mrs. Randal Norris, for a day or so, and that last night Charles Valentine Le Grice gave him a dinner at the Bell at Edmonton, "where we talk'd of what old friends were taken or left in the 30 years since we had met." Le Grice, now a rich widower, had given up his clerical duties and was settled at Trereife, in Cornwall. He was sixty in February; Lamb fifty-eight. A few days later, on July 19th, Lamb dined with Rickman, again at the Bell, to meet Godwin and be reconciled with him after "a slight coolness." How the coolness grew I do not know, but cordiality was restored. Godwin, who was now busy on his *Lives of the Necromancers*, was an old man of seventy-seven.

Although Mary Lamb had not recovered, the date of Emma Isola's marriage was fixed for July 30th, as we gather from the very charming letter to Moxon of July 24th:—

"For God's sake, give Emma no more watches. *One* has turn'd her head. She is arrogant, and insulting. She said something very unpleasant to our old Clock in the passage, as if he did not keep time, and yet he had made her no appointment. She takes it out every instant to look at the moment-hand. She lugs us out into the fields, because there the bird-boys ask you 'Pray, Sir, can you tell us what's a Clock,' and she answers them punctually. She loses all her time looking 'what the time is.' I overheard her whispering, 'Just so many hours, minutes, &c. to Tuesday—I think St. George's goes too slow'— This little present of Time, why, 'tis Eternity to her—

"What can make her so fond of a gingerbread watch?

"She has spoil'd some of the movements. Between ourselves, she has kissed away 'half past 12,' which I suppose to be the canonical hour in Hanover Sq.

"Well, if 'love me, love my watch,' answers, she will keep time to you—

"It goes right by the Horse Guards—

[*On the next page:—*]

"Emma hast kist this yellow wafer—a hint.

"DEAREST M.

"Never mind opposite nonsense. She does not love you for the watch, but the watch for you.



"I will be at the wedding, and keep the 30 July as long as my poor months last me, as a festival gloriously.

"Your ever ELIA.

"We have not heard from Cambridge. I will write the moment we do.

"Edmonton, 24th July, 3:20 post mer. minutes 4 instants by Emma's watch."

The wedding was celebrated at St. George's, Hanover Square, on July 30th. In describing it in a letter to Louisa Badams, Lamb says that in the rôle of grave father he behaved tolerably well. Emma looked as pretty as Pamela. "I tripped a little at the altar, was engaged in admiring the altar-piece, but, recalled seasonably by a Parsonic rebuke, 'Who gives this woman!' was in time to reply resolutely 'I do.'" As we see from the notes that follow, Mary Lamb recovered either on the day of the wedding, or immediately after.

"DEAR MR. AND MRS. MOXON—

"Time very short. I wrote to Miss Fryer, and had the sweetest letter about you, Emma, that ever friendship dictated. 'I am full of good wishes, I am crying with good wishes,' she says; but you shall see it.—

"Dear Moxon, I take your writing most kindly, and shall most kindly your writing from Paris—

"I want to crowd another letter to Miss Fry into the little time after dinner before Post time.

"So with 20000 congratulations,

"Yours,

C. L.

"I am calm, sober, happy. Turn over for the reason.

"I got home from Dover St., by Evens, *half as sober as a judge*. I am turning over a new leaf, as I hope you will now.

[On the next leaf Mary Lamb wrote:—]

"MY DEAR EMMA AND EDWARD MOXON,

"Accept my sincere congratulations, and imagine more good wishes than my weak nerves will let me put into good set words. The dreary blank of *unanswered questions* which I ventured to ask in vain was cleared up on the wedding-day by Mrs. W. taking a glass of wine, and, with a total change of countenance, begged leave to drink Mr. and Mrs. Moxon's health. It restored me, from that moment: as if by an electrical stroke: to the entire possession of my senses—I never felt so calm and

quiet after a similar illness as I do now. I feel as if all tears were wiped from my eyes, and all care from my heart.

"MARY LAMB."

At the foot of this letter Charles Lamb added :—

"Wednesday.

"DEARS AGAIN

"Your letter interrupted a seventh game at Picquet which *we* were having, after walking to *Wright's* and purchasing shoes. We pass our time in cards, walks, and reading. We attack *Tasso* soon.

C. L.

"Never was such a calm, or such a recovery. 'Tis her own words, undictated."

Lamb's verses to Moxon on his marriage, which were printed in the *Athenæum* for December 7th, 1833, run thus :—

What makes a happy wedlock? What has fate  
Not given to thee in thy well-chosen mate?  
Good sense—good humour;—these are trivial things,  
Dear M—, that each trite encomiast sings.  
But she hath these, and more. A mind exempt  
From every low-bred passion, where contempt,  
Nor envy, nor detraction, ever found  
A harbour yet; an understanding sound;  
Just views of right and wrong; perception full  
Of the deformed, and of the beautiful,  
In life and manners; wit above her sex,  
Which, as a gem, her sprightly converse decks;  
Exuberant fancies, prodigal of mirth,  
To gladden woodland walk, or winter hearth;  
A noble nature, conqueror in the strife  
Of conflict with a hard discouraging life,  
Strengthening the veins of virtue, past the power  
Of those whose days have been one silken hour,  
Spoil'd fortune's pamper'd offspring; a keen sense  
Alike of benefit, and of offence.  
With reconcilment quick, that instant springs  
From the charged heart with nimble angel wings;  
While grateful feelings, like a signet sign'd  
By a strong hand, seem burnt into her mind.  
If these, dear friend, a dowry can confer  
Richer than land, thou hast them all in her;  
And beauty, which some hold the chiefest boon,  
Is in thy bargain for a make-weight thrown.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edward Moxon died on June 3rd, 1858; his widow, who might be called the last of the Lamb family, died at Brighton on February 2nd, 1891, aged eighty-two.

The letters for the rest of 1833, which are unimportant, are chiefly to Moxon concerning family matters. That Mary Lamb continued in good health we know from the correspondence and from Crabb Robinson's remark in a letter to Wordsworth, on November 3rd: "I saw Lamb and his sister a few days ago. They were looking uncommonly well." Wordsworth replied: "We were delighted to have so good an account of the Lambs. Give our kindest love when you see them, and tell L. that his works are our delight, as is evidenced better than by words,—by April weather of smiles and tears whenever we read them."

On November 30th Lamb's "Thoughts on Presents of Game" were printed in the *Athenæum*, wherein he advanced here to the place in his affections once occupied by Roast Pig. It was his very last piece of writing quite in his old manner, if we except the final paragraph in the *Table Talk* published a few months later. These are the "Thoughts":—

Time was, when Elia was not arrived at his taste, that he preferred to all luxuries a roasted Pig. But he disclaims all such green-sickness appetites in future, though he hath to acknowledge the receipt of many a delicacy in that kind from correspondents—good, but mistaken men—in consequence of their erroneous supposition, that he had carried up into mature life the prepossessions of childhood. From the worthy Vicar of Enfield he acknowledges a tithe contribution of extraordinary sapor. The ancients must have loved hares. Else why adopt the word *lepores* (obviously from *lepus*) but for some subtle analogy between the delicate flavour of the latter, and the finer relishes of wit in what we most poorly translate *pleasantries*. The fine madresses of the poet are the very decoction of his diet. Thence is he hare-brained. Harum-scarum is a libellous unfounded phrase, of modern usage. 'Tis true the hare is the most circumspect of animals, sleeping with her eye open. Her ears, ever erect, keep them in that wholesome exercise, which conduces them to form the very tit-bit of the admirers of this noble animal. Noble will I call her, in spite of her detractors, who from occasional demonstrations of the principle of self-preservation (common to all animals) infer in her a defect of heroism. Half a hundred horsemen, with thrice the number of dogs, scour the country in pursuit of puss across three counties; and because the well-flavoured beast, weighing the odds, is willing to evade the hue and cry, with her delicate ears shrinking perchance from discord—comes the grave Naturalist, Linnaeus perchance or Buffon, and gravely sets down the Hare as a—timid animal. Why, Achilles, or Bully Dawson, would have declined the preposterous combat.

In fact, how light of digestion we feel after a hare! How tender its processes after swallowing! What chyle it promotes! How ethereal! as if its living celerity were a type of its nimble coursing through the animal juices. The notice might be longer. It is intended less as a Natural History of the Hare, than a cursory thanks to the country "good Unknown." The hare has many friends, but none sincerer than  
ELIA.

One of the last letters of the year is to Samuel Rogers, thank-





A STATUETTE EITHER OF CHARLES LAMB OR THE FIRST DUKE OF SUTHERLAND



ing him for a copy of the new edition of his poems, illustrated by Turner and Stothard, and telling him of a sonnet to himself in the *Times*, and one to Stothard, "in which he is as everything and you as nothing," in the *Athenæum*. At the end Lamb remarks: "It is not the flatteringest compliment, in a letter to an author, to say you have not read his book yet. But the devil of a reader he must be who prances through it in five minutes, and no longer have I received the parcel. It was a little tantalizing to me to receive a letter from Landor, *Gebir* Landor, from Florence, to say he was just sitting down to read my 'Elia,' just received, but the letter was to go out before the reading. There are calamities in authorship which only authors know."

This is a suitable place in which to introduce what may possibly be a new presentment of Lamb: the statuette of which a photograph is given on the opposite page. The statuette, which is ten inches high, in Biscuit porcelain and without any lettering upon it, is to be seen among the pottery left to the Brighton Museum by the late Henry Willett, who believed it to represent Lamb, a belief in which he was supported by the South Kensington officials. Certainly it is very like; but the circumstance that an almost identical statuette at Stafford House has always been considered to represent the first Duke of Sutherland makes it impossible to do more than suggest that this is the essayist.



## CHAPTER L

1834

Mary Lamb and Her Brother—Her “Rambling Chat”—The Martins in Trouble—Lamb and Samuel Warren—N. P. Willis and the Lambs—The Death of Coleridge—The Testimony of the Two Friends—The Beginning of the End—Mr. Fuller Russell’s Reminiscences of Edmonton—Thomas Westwood Again—Butcher on Lamb—The Accident—Lamb’s Death—Wordsworth’s Epitaph—Cary’s Epitaph—Lamb and Cowper.

OUR first glimpse of Lamb in 1834, the last year of his life, is in Macready’s diary. On January 9th the tragedian supped at Talfourd’s to meet Lamb, among others present being John Forster, the Barron Fields and Moxon. “I noted,” says Macready, “the odd saying of Lamb’s, that ‘the last breath he drew in he wished might be through a pipe and exhaled in a pun.’” The remark may perhaps be considered as additional evidence that Lamb still smoked.

A letter to Mary Betham tells us that Mary Lamb, after being well from the end of July to the end of December, had fallen ill again almost on New Year’s Day, 1834. She remained ill until the end of April at least. On February 10th, his fifty-ninth birthday, Lamb was at Dover Street, with the Moxons, as he tells Miss Fryer, an old schoolfellow of Emma Moxon’s, adding the following sad yet beautiful words concerning his sister: “It is no new thing for me to be left to my sister. When she is not violent, her rambling chat is better to me than the sense and sanity of this world. Her heart is obscured, not buried; it breaks out occasionally; and one can discern a strong mind struggling with the billows that have gone over it. I could be nowhere happier than under the same roof with her. Her memory is unnaturally strong; and from ages past, if we may so call the earliest records of our poor life, she fetches thousands of names and things that never would have dawned upon me again, and thousands from the ten years she lived before me. What

took place from early girlhood to her coming of age principally lives again (every important thing and every trifle) in her brain, with the vividness of real presence. For twelve hours incessantly she will pour out without intermission all her past life, forgetting nothing, pouring out name after name to the Waldens, as a dream; sense and nonsense; truths and errors huddled together; a medley between inspiration and possession. What things we are! I know you will bear with me, talking of these things. It seems to ease me; for I have nobody to tell these things to now."

"Her rambling chat is better to me than the sense and sanity of this world"—that was one of the last things that Lamb wrote; and one of his earliest poems was the sonnet to his sister, ending thus:—

Thou to me didst ever shew  
Kindest affection; and would oft-times lend  
An ear to the desponding love-sick lay,  
Weeping my sorrows with me, who repay  
But ill the mighty debt of love I owe,  
Mary, to thee, my sister and my friend.

Lamb, says Talfourd, speaks of his sister "pouring out memories of all the events and persons of her younger days;—but he does not mention, what I am able from repeated experiences to add, that her ramblings often sparkled with brilliant description and shattered beauty. She would fancy herself in the days of Queen Anne or George the First, and describe the brocaded dames and courtly manners, as though she had been bred among them, in the best style of the old comedy. It was all broken and disjointed, so that the hearer could remember little of her discourse; but the fragments were like the jewelled speeches of Congreve, only shaken from their setting. There was sometimes even a vein of crazy logic running through them, associating things essentially most dissimilar, but connecting them by a verbal association in strange order. As a mere physical instance of deranged intellect, her condition was, I believe, extraordinary; it was as if the finest elements of mind had been shaken into fantastic combinations like those of a kaleidoscope;—but not for the purpose of exhibiting a curious phenomenon of mental aberration are the aspects of her insanity unveiled, but to illustrate the moral force of gentleness by which the faculties that thus sparkled

when restraining wisdom was withdrawn, were subjected to its sway, in her periods of reason."

On February 22nd we have the last letter to Wordsworth, which characteristically was an appeal for help for a friend in difficulties. "The oldest and best friends I have left are in trouble. A branch of them (and they of the best stock of God's creatures, I believe) is establishing a school at Carlisle. Her name is Louisa Martin, her address 75 Castle Street, Carlisle; her qualities (and her motives for this exertion) are the most amiable, most upright. For thirty years she has been tried by me, and on her behaviour I would stake my soul. O if you can recommend her, how would I love you—if I could love you better. Pray, pray, recommend her. She is as good a human creature,—next to my Sister, perhaps the most exemplary female I ever knew."

On March 20th Crabb Robinson's *Diary* contains this painful entry: "I had Barron Field to breakfast with me. Also Lamb . . . To have so excellent a creature with all his infirmities in one's room is delightful, but mixed with pain on account of the destruction he is rapidly bringing on himself."

On April 16th Lamb dined at Cary's, at the Museum. On the next day Crabb Robinson writes: "C. Lamb, by an old appointment, breakfasted with me. And also Barron Field. I invited Warren; he was the great talker and told stories not without interest chiefly about scenes of execution which he has witnessed. . . . C. L. was in better health than when he came last." Warren was Samuel Warren, author of *Ten Thousand a Year*, and Lamb did not like him. During the morning Warren remarked that he did not know much French—for a gentleman; causing Lamb to interject that he also was deficient: he did not know much French—for a blackguard.

On May 10th we have the last letter to Manning: "You made me feel so funny, so happy-like; it was as if I was reading one of your old letters taken out at hazard any time between the last twenty years, 'twas so the same." Mary Lamb after nearly twenty weeks of illness was recovering. "We play Picquet, and it is like the old times a while, then goes off. . . . I walk 9 or 10 miles a day, always up the road, dear London-wards." On June 7th Crabb Robinson tells us that the recovery is complete. "Drove to Edmonton, where I found Charles Lamb and his



Sister, both more comfortable than I have seen [them] together for a long time. I had a very agreeable rubber of whist with them."

To June 19th belongs the account of Lamb and his sister which was written by Nathaniel Parker Willis, the American poet and flâneur. Willis, then a young man of twenty-eight, was loitering observantly through Europe for the *New York Mirror*, to which paper, unknown to his English friends (with whom he passed for a diplomatist in the making), he was sending lively travel sketches under the title "Pencilings by the Way." These were collected into an agreeable volume in 1835, and it is there that the breakfast party with the Lambs is described. In the course of his lion-hunting campaign in London, Willis met Crabb Robinson and requested an introduction to Elia. Robinson's reminiscences tell the story:—

"June 19, 1834:—I had this morning at breakfast Charles and Mary Lamb, who came expressly to be seen by Willis the Yankee. I had had Willis before, and I had seen him at Lady Blessington's. But I have reserved till to-day the mention of this man. He brought to me some weeks before a letter of introduction from W. S. Landor, speaking of him as an Attaché to the American Legation—a poet and litterateur. He especially wished to know Ch. & M. Lamb. When he first came to me, his appearance was that of a dandy. One who strives to be genteel. He had till now excited no suspicion. Nor was there any reason to suspect him. The morning's breakfast was not remarkable. My journal says merely 'Poor M. L. was not strong, but C. L. was quiet.' W. was glad to have seen them." Robinson then remarks that Willis was not an Attaché, and that Landor was furious on discovering this fact and also that he was serving up his London acquaintance in letters to the American press.

But Willis's indiscretions were not malicious, and his account of the breakfast with the Lambs in Robinson's rooms is good reading. "There was a rap at the door at last, and enter a gentleman in black small-clothes and gaiters, short and very slight in his person, his head set on his shoulders with a thoughtful, forward bent, his hair just sprinkled with gray, a beautiful deep-set eye, aquiline nose, and a very indescribable mouth. Whether it expressed most humour or feeling, good-nature or a kind of

whimsical peevishness, or twenty other things which passed over it by turns, I cannot in the least be certain.

“His sister, whose literary reputation is associated very closely with her brother’s, and who as the original of ‘Bridget Elia’ is a kind of object for literary affection, came in after him. She is a small, bent figure, evidently a victim to ill-health, and hears with difficulty. Her face, has been, I should think, a fine and handsome one, and her bright gray eye is still full of intelligence and fire. They both seemed quite at home in our friend’s chambers; and as there was to be no one else, we immediately drew round the breakfast-table. I had set a large arm-chair for Miss Lamb. ‘Don’t take it, Mary,’ said Lamb, pulling it away from her very gravely, ‘it looks as if you were going to have a tooth drawn.’

“The conversation was very local. Our host and his guest had not met for some weeks, and they had a great deal to say of some mutual friends. Perhaps in this way, however, I saw more of the author, for his manner of speaking of them, and the quaint humour with which he complained of one, and spoke well of another, was so in the vein of his inimitable writings, that I could have fancied myself listening to an audible composition of new Elia. Nothing could be more delightful than the kindness and affection between the brother and the sister, though Lamb was continually taking advantage of her deafness to mystify her with the most singular gravity upon every topic that was started. ‘Poor Mary!’ said he, ‘she hears all of an epigram but the point.’ ‘What are you saying of me, Charles?’ she asked. ‘Mr. Willis,’ said he, raising his voice, ‘admires *your Confessions of a Drunkard* very much, and I was saying it was no merit of yours that you understood the subject.’ We had been speaking of this admirable essay (which is his own) half an hour before.

“The conversation turned upon literature after a while, and our host could not express himself strongly enough in admiration of Webster’s speeches, which he said were exciting the greatest attention among the politicians and lawyers of England. Lamb said, ‘I don’t know much of American authors. Mary, there, devours Cooper’s novels with a ravenous appetite, with which I have no sympathy. The only American book I ever read twice, was the “Journal of Edward [John] Woolman,” a quaker preacher and tailor, whose character is one of the finest I ever met with. He tells a story or two about negro slaves, that

brought the tears into my eyes. I can read no prose now, though Hazlitt sometimes, to be sure—but then Hazlitt is worth all modern prose-writers put together.'

"Mr. R. spoke of buying a book of Lamb's a few days before, and I mentioned my having bought a copy of 'Elia' the last day I was in America, to send as a parting gift to one of the most lovely and talented women in our country. 'What did you give for it?' said Lamb. 'About seven and sixpence.' 'Permit me to pay you that,' said he, and with the utmost earnestness he counted out the money upon the table. 'I never yet wrote anything that would sell,' he continued, 'I am the publisher's ruin. My last poem won't sell a copy. Have you seen it, Mr. Willis?' I had not. 'It's only eighteen-pence, and I'll give you sixpence towards it;' and he described to me where I should find it sticking up in a shop window in the Strand.<sup>1</sup>

"Lamb ate nothing, and complained in a querulous tone of the veal-pie. There was a kind of potted fish (of which I forget the name at this moment) which he had expected our friend would procure for him. He inquired whether there was not a morsel left perhaps in the bottom of the last pot. Mr. R. was not sure. 'Send and see,' said Lamb, 'and if the pot has been cleaned, bring me the cover. I think the sight of it would do me good.' The cover was brought, upon which there was a picture of the fish. Lamb kissed it with a reproachful look at his friend, and then left the table and began to wander round the room with a broken, uncertain step, as if he almost forgot to put one leg before the other. His sister rose after a while, and commenced walking up and down very much in the same manner on the opposite side of the table, and in the course of half an hour they took their leave.

"To any one who loves the writings of Charles Lamb with but half my own enthusiasm, even these little particulars of an hour passed in his company will have an interest. To him who does not, they will seem dull and idle. Wreck as he certainly is, and must be, however, of what he was, I would rather have seen him for that single hour, than the hundred-and-one sights of London put together."

At the end of June we have this humorous scrap to Cowden Clarke referring to the Musical Festival in Westminster Abbey

<sup>1</sup> Lamb must have referred to *Satan in Search of a Wife*. His "last book" would be *The Last Essays of Elia*, which cost nine shillings.



when Clara Novello was one of the singers and Vincent Novello was at the organ: "We heard the Music in the Abbey at Winchmore Hill! and the notes were incomparably soften'd by the distance. Novello's chromatics were distinctly audible. Clara was faulty in B flat. Otherwise she sang like an angel. The trombone, and Beethoven's waltzes, were the best. Who played the oboe?"

On the morning of July 25th came a great sorrow. Coleridge died. He had long been ailing, but his death was comparatively sudden. Lamb was vexed by a request from the editor of the *Athenæum* for a few words about his old friend; but later, in November, in the album of a Mr. Keymer, a bookseller, he thus described his feelings:—

When I heard of the death of Coleridge, it was without grief. It seemed to me that he long had been on the confines of the next world,—that he had a hunger for eternity. I grieved then that I could not grieve. But, since, I feel how great a part he was of me. His great and dear spirit haunts me. I cannot think a thought, I cannot make a criticism on men and books, without an ineffectual turning and reference to him. He was the proof and touchstone of all my cogitations. He was a Grecian (or in the first form) at Christ's Hospital, where I was Deputy-Grecian; and the same subordination and deference to him I have preserved through a life-long acquaintance. Great in his writings, he was greatest in his conversation. In him was disproved that old maxim, that we should allow every one his share of talk. He would talk from morn to dewy eve, nor cease till far midnight; yet who ever would interrupt him? who would obstruct that continuous flow of converse, fetched from Helicon or Zion? He had the tact of making the unintelligible seem plain. Many who read the abstruser parts of his "Friend" would complain that his words did not answer to his spoken wisdom. They were identical. But he had a tone in oral delivery which seemed to convey sense to those who were otherwise imperfect recipients. He was my fifty-years-old friend without a dissension. Never saw I his likeness, nor probably the world can see again. I seem to love the house he died at more passionately than when he lived. I love the faithful Gilmans more than while they exercised their virtues towards him living. What was his mansion is consecrated to me a chapel.

Lamb did not attend Coleridge's funeral, but "shortly after," says Talfourd, "assured that his presence would be welcome, he went to Highgate. There he asked leave to see the nurse who had attended upon Coleridge; and being struck and affected by the feeling she manifested towards his friend, insisted on her receiving five guineas from him,—a gratuity which seemed almost incomprehensible to the poor woman, but which Lamb could not help giving as an immediate expression of his own gratitude. From her he learned the effort by which Coleridge had suppressed the expression of his sufferings, and the discovery affected him

even more than the news of his death. He would startle his friends sometimes by suddenly exclaiming, 'Coleridge is dead!' and then pass on to common themes, having obtained the momentary relief of oppressed spirits."

The Lambs had been much in Coleridge's thoughts at the end. On his death-bed he had written, in pencil, in a copy of his *Poetical Works*, against the poem "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison," the words: "*Ch. and Mary Lamb—dear to my heart, yea, as it were, my heart. S.T.C. Act 63, 1834. 1797-1834 = 37 years!*" (It was in the summer of 1797 that the poem was written, as we saw in Chapter XI.) Coleridge's will contained this clause: "And further, as a relief to my own feelings of the opportunity of mentioning their names, that I request of my executor, that a small plain gold mourning ring, with my hair, may be presented to the following persons, namely:—To my close friend and ever-beloved schoolfellow, Charles Lamb—and in the deep and almost life-long affection of which this is the slender record; his equally-beloved sister, Mary Lamb, will know herself to be included." The names of five other friends followed.

Allsop, in his notes of a conversation with Lamb, writes that he spoke "with great feeling of Coleridge, and with a grateful sense of what he had been to him, adding after a recapitulation of the friends he admired or loved, 'But Coleridge is a glorious person,' and, with a smile of that peculiar sweetness so entirely his own, 'He teaches what is best.'" Gillman records that Lamb said of Coleridge, "his talk is as fine as an angel's."

Lamb, however, was not always so reverent with his friend, as we have occasionally seen. Many writers tell the story, now a commonplace, of his reply to Coleridge's question, "Charles, did you ever hear me preach?"—"I never heard you do anything else."<sup>1</sup> And Leigh Hunt records his remark on their walk home after an evening wholly occupied by Coleridge in a theological monologue, "You mustn't mind Coleridge, Hunt; he's so full of his fun." But Lamb's drollest story of all touching his friend—related by an American writer, John Dix, in a little book otherwise of no value, entitled *Lions Living and Dead*, 1852—is to the effect that one day on his way to the city he met Coleridge, "brimful of some new idea, and in spite of my assuring him that

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge himself in the *Table Talk* tells us that Lamb "translated my motto 'Sermoni propria' by 'properer for a sermon.'"

time was precious, he drew me within the door of an unoccupied garden by the road-side, and there, sheltered from observation by a hedge of evergreens, he took me by the button of my coat, and closing his eyes commenced an eloquent discourse, waving his right hand gently, as the musical words flowed in an unbroken stream from his lips. I listened entranced; but the striking of a church-clock recalled me to a sense of duty. I saw it was of no use to attempt to break away, so taking advantage of his absorption in his subject, I, with my penknife, quietly severed the button from my coat, and decamped. Five hours afterwards, in passing the same garden, on my way home, I heard Coleridge's voice, and on looking in, there he was, with closed eyes,—the button in his fingers,—and his right hand gracefully waving, just as when I left him. He had never missed me!" The story is of course untrue, but as a commentary on Coleridge's later conversational manner it could hardly be better.

Coleridge's references to Lamb are numerous—Leslie the painter records that he told him he held Lamb's character "sacred"—but one of the least known and most interesting is that which follows, from the *Monthly Repository* in 1835, being part of a conversation that was taken down on the evening it occurred: "Charles Lamb has more totality and individuality of character than any other man I know, or have ever known in all my life. In most men we distinguish between the different powers of their intellect as one being predominant over the other. The genius of Wordsworth is greater than his talent, though considerable. The talent of Southey is greater than his genius, though respectable; and so on. But in Charles Lamb it is altogether one; his genius is talent, and his talent is genius, and his heart is as whole and one as his head. The wild words that come from him sometimes on religious subjects would shock you from the mouth of any other man, but from him they seem mere flashes of fireworks. If an argument seem to his reason not fully true, he bursts out in that odd desecrating way; yet his will, the inward man, is, I well know, profoundly religious. Watch him, when alone, and you will find him with either a Bible, or an old divine, or an old English poet; in such is his pleasure."

For some years the intercourse of the two friends had been only casual; Enfield and Highgate were far apart; Coleridge rarely left home; Lamb did not care to make so long a journey





*S T Coleridge*

COLERIDGE IN OLD AGE.

FROM THE CARICATURE BY MACULIST, IN FRASER'S MAGAZINE.



with the chance at the end of it of finding Coleridge ramparted by strangers. But as they both drew nearer the end the ancient tenderness of their early friendship, before the world had intervened, revived in the thoughts of each.

Little as he saw of him or heard from him, Coleridge was, next to Mary Lamb, the best-loved thing in Lamb's life in these last years. Not so much perhaps for what he was as for what he stood for: symbolising that remote past which, as he grew older and sadder and more lonely, increasingly dominated Lamb's mind. Emma Isola, much as he loved her, was too recent to count against this wistful preoccupation. So long as Coleridge lived there was still something to make life worth while: a tangible earnest of the old careless days. But when Coleridge died Lamb, I think, lost heart utterly. His sister he still had; but the responsibility was becoming too great, the periods of separation were too frequent and too shattering. Coleridge over there at Highgate, accessible if one wished, kept him in touch with the past, *was* the past. Coleridge dead, the world became foreign, peopled by strangers who were young and modern, lacking memories, controlled by new interests, ignorant of Oronooko and egg hot.

Lamb, I believe, began to die on July 25th. He survived his friend only five months. Wordsworth, in his "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg," in 1835, coupled their names for all time in the stanzas:—

Nor has the rolling year twice measured,  
From sign to sign, its stedfast course,  
Since every mortal power of Coleridge  
Was frozen at its marvellous source;

The 'rapt One, of the godlike forehead,  
The heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth:  
And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,  
Has vanished from his lonely hearth.

We have a glimpse of the Lambs at Edmonton in some reminiscences of Mr. J. Fuller Russell, who, then a young man, had sent Lamb a poem in manuscript, hoping for criticism, and followed it by one or two visits to Walden Cottage. He published, forty years later, in the *Guardian*, his account of what happened. On the first morning that he called—on August 5th, 1834—Lamb had not yet returned from his walk: "I was admitted into a small and pleasantly shaded parlour.



The modest room was hung round with fine engravings by Hogarth, in dark frames. Books and magazines were scattered on the table, and on the old-fashioned window-seat. I chatted awhile with Miss Lamb—a meek, intelligent, very pleasant, and rather deaf, elderly lady, who told me that her brother had been gratified by parts of my poem, and had read them to her. ‘Elia’ came in soon after—a short, thin man. His dress was black—a capacious coat, knee-breeches, and gaiters, and he wore a white neck-handkerchief. His head was remarkably fine, and his dark and shaggy hair and eyebrows, heated face, and very piercing jet-black eyes gave to his appearance a singularly wild and striking expression. The sketch of him in *Fraser’s Magazine* gives a true idea of his figure, but no portrait, I am sure, could do justice to his splendid countenance. He grasped me cordially by the hand, sat down, and taking a bottle from a cupboard behind him, mixed some rum-and-water. On another occasion, his sister objected to this operation, and he refrained. Presently after, he said, ‘May I have a little drop now, only a *leetle* drop?’ ‘No, be a good boy.’ At last he prevailed, and took his usual draught.

“On each visit I found he required to be drawn into conversation. He would throw out a playful remark, and then pause awhile. He spoke by fits and starts, and had a slight impediment in his utterance, which made him grunt once or twice before he began a sentence; but his tones were loud and rich, and once, when he read to me a passage from a folio of Beaumont and Fletcher (which his sister had brought down to show me Coleridge’s MS. remarks at the end of each play), the deep pathos of his voice gave great weight to the impression made by the poetry. He would jump up and slap his sister playfully on the back, and a roomy snuff-box often passed between them on the old round table. These little traits may serve to illustrate the character of Charles Lamb.

“I remember he agreed with me that Tom Moore’s poetry was like very rich plum cake—very nice, but too much of it at a time makes one sick. He said that Byron had written only one good-natured thing, and that was the ‘Vision of Judgment.’ ‘Mary,’ he added to Miss Lamb, ‘don’t you *hate* Byron?’ ‘Yes, Charles,’ she replied. ‘That’s right,’ said he. Of [Conversation] Sharpe’s ‘Essays,’ which had just been published and magnified

in the *Quarterly*, he asserted—‘They are commonplace, and of the two attempts at criticism in them worthy of notice, one—that on Cowper’s “boundless contiguity of shade”—is completely incorrect.’ He had a very high opinion of Wordsworth, saying, ‘He is a very noble fellow.’ I think he [Lamb] undervalued Coleridge’s poetry. He esteemed the ‘Ancient Mariner’ and ‘Christabel’ his best productions in verse. . . . He thought little of James Montgomery. He [M.] had only written one poem which pleased him, and that was among his minor pieces [“The Common Lot”]. Taylor’s *Philip Van Artevelde* had been sent to him as equal to Shakspeare. He thought it was nothing extraordinary. He had a good opinion of Tennyson’s poems, which had lately been condemned in the *Quarterly*. He said that to be a true poet a man must serve a long and rigorous apprenticeship. He must, like the mathematician, sit with a wet towel about his head, if he wished to excel. It was far easier to scribble verses than to hammer out good poetry, worthy of immortality. Of *metres*, he observed there were plenty of old ones, now little known, which were better than any new ones which could be devised, and would be quite as novel. He lost £25 by his best effort, ‘John Woodvil.’ He had, he said, a curious library of old poetry, etc., which he had bought at stalls, cheap. ‘I have *nothing useful*,’ he added: ‘as for science, I know and care nothing about it.’ . . . Mr. Lamb thought ‘The Lay’ the best of Scott’s poetical works.

“He told me that he knew his letters before he could speak, and called on his sister to vouch for the truth of this story. He hated the country, and loved to walk on the London road, because then he could fancy that he was wending thither. He was a great walker. He never read what any of the reviews said about him. . . . He had written a poem called the ‘Devil’s Marriage’<sup>1</sup> to a tailor’s daughter, but suppressed it on finding that Dr. —, the Vicar of —, had committed a like nuptial indiscretion. On rising to leave him, on my last visit, I could not open the parlour door! ‘Ah,’ he exclaimed, with a sweet smile, ‘you can unlock the springs of Helicon, but you cannot open the door!’” So far Mr. Fuller Russell, whose experiments with the springs of Helicon, by the way, were not very auspicious, as a glance at

<sup>1</sup> *Satan in Search of a Wife*. It was not, I think, suppressed.

my edition of Lamb's Letters, where the essayist's criticisms of the poet's effort "Emily de Wilton" are printed, will show.

The reminiscences which have just been quoted were printed, for a second time, in 1882, in *Notes and Queries*, where they produced some comment from Mr. Thomas Westwood. He wrote, in the same periodical: "The Rev. J. Fuller Russell's graphic account of his interviews with Charles Lamb has recalled vividly to my memory the friend of my youth. My own last visit to him was also paid in that shady parlour of his Edmonton house, so near his last resting-place. A gloomy house it always seemed to me. Perhaps the shadow of what was to come brooded over it. Lamb's trick of jumping up and slapping his sister on the shoulder in moments of hilarity was a frequent and familiar outbreak. Mr. Fuller Russell, however, does not seem to have heard the triplet, half jocular, half grotesque, which Elia was wont to shout on such occasions:—

I had a sister—  
The devil kist her,  
And raised a blister!

It was his pretence to be proud of this triplet, as of a rhyming difficulty vanquished."

Mr. Westwood went on to remark that Lamb's admiration for Wordsworth's poetry was factitious, and he denied him any sense of natural beauty, but we need not, I think, adopt that view. The argument, however, leads to this pretty passage: "Amongst his visitors, indeed, were some of another strain. Miss Kelly, the actress, for instance, to whom I have alluded already in these columns. Miss Kelly, with the heart of a child, had all a child's delight in wild flowers. She had also a passion for little frogs. I was Miss Kelly's frog-catcher. When my scanty honours are counted, let not this one be overlooked. To have been Miss Kelly's frog-catcher and Bridget Elia's carpenter—that is something, surely!"

Late in 1834 Lamb writes to a Mr. Childs of Bungay, in reply to a letter asking where he could procure *Elia*. Mr. Childs' own copy seems to have been lent to a friend in India, and Lamb says, "What a supreme felicity to the author (only he is no traveller) on the Ganges or Hydaspes (Indian streams) to meet a smutty Gentoo ready to burst with laughing at the tale of Bo-Bo!<sup>1</sup> for

<sup>1</sup>"Dissertation on Roast Pig."



doubtless it hath been translated into all the dialects of the East. I grieve the less, that Europe should want it." Years before Lamb had told Manning that he wished his name to be talked of in China. *Elia* it seems was already out of print. Lamb adds: "Shall I order a copy for you? and will you accept it? Shall I *lend* you, at the same time, my sole copy of the former volume (Oh! return it) for a month or two? In return, you shall favour me with the loan of one of those Norfolk-bred grunTERS that you laud so highly; I promise not to keep it above a day. What a funny name Bungay is! I never dreamt of a correspondent thence. I used to think of it as some Utopian town or borough in Gotham land. I now believe in its existence, as part of merry England! [*Some lines scratched out.*] The part I have scratched out is the best of the letter. Let me have your commands.

CH. LAMB, *alias* ELIA."

Crabb Robinson writes on November 19th: "Bulwer wants to see Charles Lamb and will come to breakfast with me the first time L. comes." But I fancy this meeting was never accomplished. Bulwer some years later criticised Lamb with fine feeling and judgment. In a comparison between *Elia* and Scott, between subjective and objective humour, he says, "All that he knows or observes in the world of books or men becomes absorbed in the single life of his own mind, and is reproduced as part and parcel of Charles Lamb. If thus he does not create imaginary characters, Caleb Balderstones and Major Dalgettys, he calls up, completes, and leaves to the admiration of all time a character which, as a personification of humour, is a higher being than even Scott has imagined, viz. that of Charles Lamb himself. Nor is there in the whole world of humorous creation an image more beautiful in its combinations of mirth and pathos. In the embodiment of humour, as it actually lived amongst us in this man, there is a dignity equal to that with which Cervantes elevates our delight in his ideal creation. Quixote is not more essentially a gentleman than Lamb."

A short time only before Lamb's fatal illness, says Talfourd, "he yielded to my urgent importunity, and met a small party of his friends at dinner at my house, where we had provided for him some of the few articles of food which now seemed to hit his fancy, and among them the hare, which had supplanted pig in his just esteem, with the hope of exciting his very delicate

appetite. We were not disappointed ; he ate with a relish not usual with him of late years, and passed the evening in his happiest mood. Among the four or five who met him on this occasion, the last on which I saw him in health, were his old friends Mr. Barron Field, Mr. Procter, and Mr. Forster, the author of the *Lives of Eminent English Statesmen*, a friend of comparatively recent date, but one with whom Lamb found himself as much at home as if he had known him for years."

One more letter and we reach the end. Lamb had borrowed Phillips's *Theatrum Poetarum* from Cary, and had left it at George Dyer's rooms in Clifford's Inn. On December 22nd he wrote to Mrs. Dyer asking her to despatch it to Edmonton.<sup>1</sup> It was his last letter. On the same morning, Monday, December 22nd, walking London-wards towards the Bell, Lamb stumbled over a stone and fell, grazing his face. Talfourd tells the story : "On Friday evening Mr. Ryle, of the India House, who had been appointed co-executor with me of his will some years before, called on me, and informed me that he was in danger. I went over to Edmonton on the following morning, and found him very weak, and nearly insensible to things passing around him. Now and then a few words were audible, from which it seemed that

<sup>1</sup> In the life of H. F. Cary by his son we read : "He [Lamb] had borrowed of my father Phillips's *Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum*, which was returned by Lamb's friend, Mr. Moxon, with the leaf folded down at the account of Sir Philip Sydney." Cary acknowledged the receipt of the book by the following poem :—

#### LINES TO THE MEMORY OF CHARLES LAMB.

So should it be, my gentle friend ;  
Thy leaf last closed at Sydney's end.  
Thou, too, like Sydney, wouldst have given  
The water, thirsting and near heaven ;  
Nay were it wine, fill'd to the brim,  
Thou hadst look'd hard, but given, like him.

And art thou mingled then among  
Those famous sons of ancient song ?  
And do they gather round, and praise  
Thy relish of their nobler lays ?  
Waxing in mirth to hear thee tell  
With what strange mortals thou didst dwell !  
At thy quaint sallies more delighted,  
Than any's long among them lighted !

'Tis done : and thou hast join'd a crew,  
To whom thy soul was justly due ;  
And yet I think, where'er thou be,  
They'll scarcely love thee more than we.

his mind, in its feebleness, was intent on kind and hospitable thoughts. His last correspondent, Mr. Childs, had sent a present of a turkey, instead of the suggested pig; and the broken sentences which could be heard, were of some meeting of friends to partake of it. I do not think he knew me; and having vainly tried to engage his attention, I quitted him, not believing his death so near at hand. In less than an hour afterwards, his voice gradually grew fainter, as he still murmured the names of Moxon, Procter, and some other old friends, and he sank into death as placidly as into sleep." So, on Saturday, December 27th, 1834, died Charles Lamb, in his sixtieth year.

Mary Lamb was at once visited by an attack of her malady that mercifully deprived her of any true sense of what was happening. She spoke of Lamb's death as if it were an ordinary matter of daily life. Crabb Robinson writes on January 1st, 1835: "I had a letter from Talfourd this morning. . . . Miss Lamb is quite insane, yet conscious of her brother's death, without feeling it, and able to point out the place for the grave." Robinson decided not to attend the funeral, at which were Talfourd and Ryle, the executors, friends from the India House, Moxon, Procter, Allsop and Cary.

It was decided to ask Wordsworth for some lines to be cut upon Lamb's tombstone, and Moxon made the request in November, 1835, asking also for permission for Talfourd, who had been entrusted with Lamb's biography, to print the letters to the Wordsworths. Wordsworth replied in the following letter: "In a few days I hope to have an opportunity of sending such a selection of Lamb's letters, to myself and my family, as appear to me not unfit for immediate publication. There are, however, in them some parts which had better be kept back. . . . I have also thought proper to suppress every word of criticism upon my own poems. . . . The suppressed letters shall not be destroyed. Those relating to my works are withheld, partly because I shrink from the thought of assisting in any way to spread my own praises, and still more as being convinced that the opinions or judgments of friends given in this way are of little value."<sup>1</sup>

Wordsworth continues: "On the other page you have the

<sup>1</sup>By permission of Mr. Gordon Wordsworth the Lamb-Wordsworth correspondence in full is now printed in Volumes VI. and VII. of my edition of Lamb, the causes of objection to publication having long ceased to exist.



requested epitaph. It was composed yesterday; and, by sending it immediately, I have prepared the way, I believe, for a speedy repentance, as I do not know that I ever wrote so many lines without some retrenchment being afterwards necessary. If these verses should be wholly unsuitable for the end Miss L. had in view, I shall find no difficulty in reconciling myself to the thought of their not being made use of, though it would have given me great, very great, pleasure to fulfil her wishes in all points.

“The first objection that will strike you, and every one, is its extreme length, especially compared with epitaphs as they are now written; but this objection might in part be obviated by engraving the lines in double column, and not in capitals.

“Chiabrera has been my model—though I am aware that Italian churches,—both on account of their size, and the climate of Italy,—are more favourable to long inscriptions than ours. His epitaphs are characteristic and circumstantial. So have I endeavoured to make this of mine; but I have not ventured to touch upon the most striking feature of our departed friend’s character, and the most affecting circumstance of his life, namely, his faithful and intense love of his sister. Had I been framing an Elegy or Monody this would and must have been done; but seeing and feeling the sanctity of that relation as it ought to be seen and felt, lights are required which could scarcely be furnished by an epitaph, unless it were to touch on little or nothing else. The omission, therefore, in my view of the case, was unavoidable, and I regret it the less,—you yourself having already treated the subject in verse with genuine tenderness and beauty.<sup>1</sup> . . .

“I cannot conclude without adding that the epitaph, if used at all, can only be placed in the church. It is much too long for an out-door stone, among our rains, damps, etc. . . .”

Wordsworth’s poem, in its final state, I give below, first quoting a passage from the note which he prefixed to it in the edition of 1845: “Mary Lamb was ten years older than her brother, and has survived him as long a time. Were I to give way to my own feelings, I should dwell not only on her genius and intellectual powers, but upon the delicacy and refinement of manner which she maintained inviolable under most trying circumstances. She was loved and honoured by all her brother’s friends; and others, some of them strange characters, whom his philanthropic peculiari-

<sup>1</sup> See the sonnets on pages 649 and 650.

ties induced him to countenance. The death of C. Lamb himself was doubtless hastened by his sorrow for that of Coleridge, to whom he had been attached from the time of their being school-fellows at Christ's Hospital."

To a good Man of most dear memory  
 This Stone is sacred. Here he lies apart  
 From the great city where he first drew breath,  
 Was reared and taught; and humbly earned his bread,  
 To the strict labours of the merchant's desk  
 By duty chained. Not seldom did those tasks  
 Tease, and the thought of time so spent depress,  
 His spirit, but the recompence was high;  
 Firm Independence, Bounty's rightful sire;  
 Affections, warm as sunshine, free as air;  
 And when the precious hours of leisure came,  
 Knowledge and wisdom, gained from converse sweet  
 With books, or while he ranged the crowded streets  
 With a keen eye, and overflowing heart:  
 So genius triumphed over seeming wrong,  
 And poured out truth in works by thoughtful love  
 Inspired—works potent over smiles and tears.  
 And as round mountain-tops the lightning plays,  
 Thus innocently sported, breaking forth  
 As from a cloud of some grave sympathy,  
 Humour and wild instinctive wit, and all  
 The vivid flashes of his spoken words.  
 From the most gentle creature nursed in fields  
 Had been derived the name he bore—a name,  
 Wherever Christian altars have been raised,  
 Hallowed to meekness and to innocence;  
 And if in him meekness at times gave way,  
 Provoked out of herself by troubles strange,  
 Many and strange, that hung about his life;  
 Still, at the centre of his being, lodged  
 A soul by resignation sanctified:  
 And if too often, self-reproached, he felt  
 That innocence belongs not to our kind,  
 A power that never ceased to abide in him,  
 Charity, 'mid the multitude of sins  
 That she can cover, left not his exposed  
 To an unforgiving judgment from just Heaven.  
 O, he was good, if e'er a good Man lived!

From a reflecting mind and sorrowing heart  
 Those simple lines flowed with an earnest wish,  
 Though but a doubting hope, that they might serve  
 Fitly to guard the precious dust of him  
 Whose virtues called them forth. That aim is missed;

For much that truth most urgently required  
 Had from a faltering pen been asked in vain :  
 Yet, haply, on the printed page received,  
 The imperfect record, there, may stand unblamed  
 As long as verse of mine shall breathe the air  
 Of memory, or see the light of love.

Thou wert a scorner of the fields, my Friend,  
 But more in show than truth ; and from the fields,  
 And from the mountains, to thy rural grave  
 Transported, my soothed spirit hovers o'er  
 Its green untrodden turf, and blowing flowers ;  
 And taking up a voice shall speak (tho' still  
 Awed by the theme's peculiar sanctity  
 Which words less free presumed not even to touch)  
 Of that fraternal love, whose heaven-lit lamp  
 From infancy, through manhood, to the last  
 Of threescore years, and to thy latest hour,  
 Burnt on with ever-strengthening light, enshrined  
 Within thy bosom.

“ Wonderful ” hath been  
 The love established between man and man,  
 “ Passing the love of women ; ” and between  
 Man and his help-mate in fast wedlock joined  
 Through God, is raised a spirit and soul of love  
 Without whose blissful influence Paradise  
 Had been no Paradise ; and earth were now  
 A waste where creatures bearing human form,  
 Direst of savage beasts, would roam in fear,  
 Joyless and comfortless. Our days glide on ;  
 And let him grieve who cannot choose but grieve  
 That he hath been an Elm without his Vine,  
 And her bright dower of clustering charities,  
 That, round his trunk and branches, might have clung,  
 Enriching and adorning. Unto thee,  
 Not so enriched, not so adorned, to thee  
 Was given (say rather, thou of later birth  
 Wert given to her) a Sister—'tis a word  
 Timidly uttered, for she *lives*, the meek,  
 The self-restraining, and the ever-kind ;  
 In whom thy reason and intelligent heart  
 Found—for all interests, hopes, and tender cares,  
 All softening, humanising, hallowing powers,  
 Whether withheld, or for her sake unsought—  
 More than sufficient recompence !

Her love  
 (What weakness prompts the voice to tell it here ?)  
 Was as the love of mothers ; and when years,  
 Lifting the boy to man's estate, had called  
 The long-protected to assume the part  
 Of a protector, the first filial tie



Was undissolved ; and, in or out of sight,  
 Remained imperishably interwoven  
 With life itself. Thus, 'mid a shifting world,  
 Did they together testify of time  
 And season's difference—a double tree  
 With two collateral stems sprung from one root ;  
 Such were they—such thro' life they *might* have been  
 In union, in partition only such ;  
 Otherwise wrought the will of the Most High ;  
 Yet, thro' all visitations and all trials,  
 Still they were faithful ; like two vessels launched  
 From the same beach one ocean to explore  
 With mutual help, and sailing—to their league  
 True, as inexorable winds, or bars  
 Floating or fixed of polar ice, allow.

But turn we rather, let my spirit turn  
 With thine, O silent and invisible Friend !  
 To those dear intervals, nor rare nor brief,  
 When reunited, and by choice withdrawn  
 From miscellaneous converse, ye were taught  
 That the remembrance of foregone distress,  
 And the worse fear of future ill (which oft  
 Doth hang around it, as a sickly child  
 Upon its mother) may be both alike  
 Disarmed of power to unsettle present good  
 So prized, and things inward and outward held  
 In such an even balance, that the heart  
 Acknowledges God's grace, his mercy feels,  
 And in its depth of gratitude is still.

O gift divine of quiet sequestration !  
 The hermit, exercised in prayer and praise,  
 And feeding daily on the hope of heaven,  
 Is happy in his vow, and fondly cleaves  
 To life-long singleness ; but happier far  
 Was to your souls, and, to the thoughts of others,  
 A thousand times more beautiful appeared,  
 Your *dual* loneliness. The sacred tie  
 Is broken ; yet why grieve ? for Time but holds  
 His moiety in trust, till Joy shall lead  
 To the blest world where parting is unknown.

Wordsworth's poem was not adopted for the purpose for which it had been asked. The lines which eventually were cut on the grave of Charles and Mary Lamb were from the pen of their friend H. F. Cary. But three of Wordsworth's lines have, however, been used. In Edmonton church is a memorial to William Cowper, Keats, and Charles Lamb, the inscription beneath the medallion of Lamb running: "In Memory of Charles Lamb,

the gentle Elia, and author of the Tales from Shakespeare. Born in the Inner Temple 1775, educated at Christ's Hospital, died at Bay Cottage, Edmonton, 1834, and buried beside his sister Mary in the adjoining churchyard—

. . . At the centre of his being lodged  
A soul by resignation sanctified . . .  
O, he was good, if e'er a good Man lived."

## CHAPTER LI

## MARY LAMB'S LAST DAYS

1835-1847

## TO THE SISTER OF ELIA

Comfort thee, O thou mourner, yet awhile!  
 Again shall Elia's smile  
 Refresh thy heart, where heart can ache no more.  
 What is it we deplore?

He leaves behind him, freed from griefs and years,  
 Far worthier things than tears.  
 The love of friends without a single foe:  
 Unequall'd lot below!

His gentle soul, his genius, these are thine;  
 For these dost thou repine?  
 He may have left the lowly walks of men;  
 Left them he has; what then?

Are not his footsteps followed by the eyes  
 Of all the good and wise?  
 Though the warm day is over, yet they seek  
 Upon the lofty peak

Of his pure mind the roseate light that glows  
 O'er death's perennial snows.  
 Behold him! from the region of the blest  
 He speaks: he bids thee rest.

W. S. LANDOR.

“CONTRARY,” says Talfourd, “to Lamb’s expectation, who feared (as also his friends feared with him) the desolation of his own survivorship, which the difference of age rendered probable, Miss Lamb survived him for nearly eleven years.” (“You must die first,” Lamb had once said to her: and she had replied, “Yes, I must die first.”) “When he died,” Talfourd continues, “she was mercifully in a state of partial estrangement, which, while it did not wholly obscure her mind, deadened her feelings, so that as she gradually regained her perfect senses she felt as gradually



the full force of the blow, and was the better able calmly to bear it. For awhile she declined the importunities of her friends, that she would leave Edmonton for a residence nearer London, where they might more frequently visit her. *He* was there, asleep in the old churchyard, beneath the turf near which they had stood together, and had selected for a resting-place; to this spot she used, when well, to stroll out mournfully in the evening, and to this spot she would contrive to lead any friend who came in the summer evenings to drink tea and went out with her afterwards for a walk." Mr. Cox, the author of the account of the Lambs at Edmonton from which I have already quoted, says that in 1875 he met some one who remembered Mary Lamb wandering out into the streets asking strangers querulously for her brother.

Immediately upon Lamb's death Crabb Robinson had written to Talfourd offering to help pecuniarily if Mary Lamb was in need of such assistance. Talfourd happily was able to reply thus: "For the exertion of the substantial kindness which you proffer I do not think there will be any room. Lamb has left all his property to Ryle and myself in trust for the benefit of his sister, to be applied, as we think proper—with power to her to dispose of any which may remain—and in default of that disposal to pay any residue after her death to Mrs. Moxon. As we have no doubt we shall obtain some pension for Miss Lamb from the India House Fund, and as Lamb has left £1,100 three per cents., worth now about £1,000, which (if necessary) would purchase an annuity of £120 at least for Miss Lamb's life, I do not think any pecuniary assistance can be requisite. Should it be, we will not fail to give you the opportunity of sharing in the pleasure of supplying it. I wrote to Wordsworth on Monday."

According to Procter, who drew up Lamb's will, the estate yielded £2,000. "The property of Charles Lamb," says Procter, "or so much as might be wanted for the purpose, was by his will directed to be applied towards the maintenance and comfort of his sister; and subject to that primary object, it was vested in trustees for the benefit of Miss Isola—Mrs. Moxon." Mary Lamb, as it happened, was in comfortable circumstances, the East India House Clerks' Fund having resolved, in March, 1835, to allow her £120 a year.

Robinson's *Diary* for January 12th, 1835, records a visit to Edmonton. Mary Lamb was not herself, and yet had gleams of

herself. "‘Oh, here’s Crabby,’ she said. ‘Now this is very kind—not merely good-natured, but very, very kind—to come and see me in my affliction.’ She spoke of Charles repeatedly. . . . She will live for ever in the memory of her friends as one of the most amiable and admirable of women.” It was about this time that Landor sent to Robinson the verses which I have placed at the head of this chapter. “The death of Charles Lamb,” he wrote, “has grieved me very bitterly. Never did I see a human being with whom I was more inclined to sympathise. There is something in the recollection that you took me with you to see him which affects me greatly more than writing or speaking of him could do with any other. When I first heard of the loss that all his friends, and many that were never his friends, sustained in him, no thought took possession of my mind except the anguish of his sister.”

That very night, Landor continues, before he closed his eyes, he wrote, with his noble, generous impetuosity, the poem which I have quoted, and which he calls “this testimony of affection, this attempt at consolation to the finest genius that ever descended on the heart of woman.” Landor held Mary Lamb’s character and gifts in the highest esteem, some of which finds expression in a letter to the Countess of Blessington on March 16th, 1835, which must have been written very soon after that which I have just quoted. “Mr. Robinson, the soundest man that ever stepped through the trammels of law, gave me, a few days ago, the sorrowful information, that another of our great writers had joined Coleridge. Poor Charles Lamb, what a tender, good, joyous heart had he! What playfulness! what purity of style and thought! His sister is yet living, much older than himself. One of her tales, with the sole exception of the ‘Bride of Lammermoor,’ is the most beautiful tale in prose composition in any language, ancient or modern.<sup>1</sup> A young girl has lost her mother, the father marries again, and marries a friend of his former wife. The child is ill reconciled to it, but being dressed in new clothes for the marriage, she runs up to her mother’s chamber, filled with the idea how happy that dear mother would be at seeing her in all her glory—not reflecting, poor soul! that it was only by her mother’s death that she appeared in it. How natural, how novel is all this! Did you ever imagine that a fresh source of the pathetic would

<sup>1</sup> “The Father’s Wedding Day” in *Mrs. Leicester’s School*.

burst forth before us in this trodden and hardened world? I never did, and when I found myself upon it, I pressed my temples with both hands, and tears ran down to my elbows."

"When Miss Lamb gets better," Talfourd wrote to Crabb Robinson, "so as to be able to express any wishes as to her own residence, it will be matter of consideration whether she shall remain where she is or not;—the people appear very attentive to her, but I should prefer her living with Miss James if that could be arranged hereafter." On March 17th, 1835, Talfourd wrote again, urging the importance of removing Mary Lamb from Edmonton to some new lodging with her nurse, Miss James. "It is impossible that in the place where she now is, she can be cheered by any society she can enjoy, except very rarely indeed; and it is now clear that we shall have sufficient for her maintenance with Miss James. . . . I cannot bear the thought of her remaining unsolaced and alone, as she must feel herself, now she is capable of feeling like herself, and besides difficulties in removing her may arise if she should relapse and the coarse-minded people she is with should influence her to fancy she would rather remain with them."

Later in the year Crabb Robinson has an entry in his *Diary* which bears upon Wordsworth's poem: "December 3rd, 1835:—Went in the evening to Moxon's. With him was Miss Lamb. She was very comfortable—not in high spirits—but calm, and she seemed to enjoy the sight of so many old friends. There were Cary, Allsop, and Miss James. No direct talk about her brother. Wordsworth's epitaph she disapproves. She does not like any allusion to his being a clerk, or to family misfortunes. This is very natural. Not even dear Mary can overcome the common feeling that would conceal lowness of station, or a reference to ignoble sufferings. On the other hand, Wordsworth says, 'Lamb's submitting to that mechanical employment placed him in fine moral contrast with other men of genius—his contemporaries—who, in sacrificing personal independence, have made a wreck of morality and honour, to a degree which it is painful to consider. To me, this was a noble feature in Lamb's life, and furnishes an admirable lesson, by which thousands might profit.'"

We know, also from Robinson's *Diary*, that Talfourd's wishes with respect to Miss Lamb's removal were not realised for some



years; for he mentions visiting her at Edmonton in August 1837, when she was in good health and took him to her brother's, grave; and again in August, 1839, when he found that she had been ill for ten months, but was well enough, although "inert" of mind, to play a few games of picquet and to talk "good sense."

I have seen a letter from Procter to Talfourd dated June 22nd, 1841, when Mary Lamb was in her seventy-seventh year, which indicates why the move was at last happily made. Procter, it seems, visited Mary Lamb unexpectedly at Edmonton on June 21st, and found things not at all as they should be. Mrs. Walden had developed a very evil temper, and her patient was obviously neglected and in danger of being unduly and unnecessarily excited. Procter writes: "The woman of the house was *out*, and did not return while I remained, which was upwards of an hour. I took Miss L. a drive out (a mile or so) and she seemed very glad to have a little fresh air. She tells me that whilst the children were young, she was desirous of staying, to mediate between them and the mother (whose temper she says amounts to a disease) and partly (as far as I could collect) because she thought it might be serviceable to the people themselves. Miss Lamb was, yesterday, perfectly well. . . . In my opinion, her mere desire to leave the place—repeatedly and strongly expressed—is a sufficient reason for her leaving it. No one could talk more sensibly or better in any respect than she did yesterday. She enquired after all her friends and acquaintance—and I think if she were nearer to London, the friends of her brother and herself would have *many* opportunities of rendering the last days of her life more happy than they are at present."

The result of this letter was that, in 1841, Mary Lamb was moved to the house of Miss James's married sister—and herself a nurse—Mrs. Parsons, at 41 Alpha Road, St. John's Wood, with Miss James near at hand; and there, for the most part in the shadow, but occasionally her old self, she spent the remaining few years of her life.

Of Miss James and her sister, who were the daughters of the rector of Beguildy, in Shropshire, we should know practically nothing were it not for the reminiscences of their great-nephew the late John Hollingshead, in his interesting book, *My Lifetime*. Mr. Hollingshead, who was born in 1827, could just remember seeing Lamb—a "mannikin" is his phrase for him. He tells us that

Miss James, at some time, I imagine, in the late twenties, or early thirties, "tried her luck at lodging letting, at the corner of the Grove Road. As her 'connection,' through the Lambs, was chiefly of a literary character, her fortunes varied with the success or failure of various magazines, but I never heard that she experienced any serious trouble, except in the case of Dr. Maginn, and that she may have slightly exaggerated.

"Another aunt, Mrs. Parsons, who lived at No. 20, Alpha Road, a little lower down, had undertaken the charge of poor Mary Lamb, and had fitted her up a comfortable library sitting-room on the ground floor, with a French window opening into a garden. The garden was almost an orchard—part of the great orchard which probably gave its name to Orchard Street—and this was full of trees that produced the finest apples—now all but extinct—known as 'Ribstone Pippins.' In my wanderings, especially in the autumn, I found my way to this orchard, which was only one of many in the same road, and after giving a defiant challenge to English cholera, I spent the rest of the afternoon with the dreamy old lady, who looked over me rather than at me, and seemed to see many visions that were beyond my limited intelligence. Sometimes we played at cards—her favourite pastime—such games as I had any knowledge of, and sometimes when she was tired or liked to roam about the garden, I was allowed to browse upon the books which walled in the apartment. Most of them were authors' copies—simply bound in rough paper or boards, with ragged-edged leaves and ample margins. They were fifty years in advance of the modern artistic publisher. Many of the folios were there that had been bought by Charles Lamb in his roamings, and brought home and carefully collated with his sister, by the aid of a tallow candle. The old dramatists were, of course, well represented, and the *picaresco* school of fiction, notably *The Rogue; or, the Adventures of Don Guzman D'Alfarache*.<sup>1</sup> . . .

"Visitors sometimes came in, and I was allowed to watch them from a corner. William Godwin I thought rather prosy in his talk,<sup>2</sup> and Tom Hood did not give me the impression which his works afterwards created in my mind. Little Miss Kelly, the

<sup>1</sup> Many of Mary Lamb's books, with Mrs. Parsons' name in them and a few enriched with marginalia by Lamb, were sold at Hodgson's in December, 1906. Her copy of *The Rogue* is now in my possession.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Hollingshead was astray here. Godwin died in 1836, while Miss Lamb was still at Edmonton. If he visited the house, it must have been as the guest of another of Miss James's lodgers.

actress and artistic mother of Mrs. Keeley, had none of the modern stage-tinsel about her; and Crabb Robinson had a trustee air, which he probably acquired by living in the Temple. These are only the hazy impressions of a poor, ignorant boy, who had to use his eyes and ears, with little more than instinct to guide him. In the cool of the evening, when the bats were flying about, I was allowed a pinch of snuff out of the historic silver box, marked 'M. L.' . . . That snuff-box eventually came into my possession, and I gave it to the Duke of Fife as a present on his marriage."

One letter and one acrostic by Charles Lamb are the only documents which Miss James preserved, destroying the remainder, says Mr. Hollingshead, on a "mistaken question of principle." Lamb was unfortunate in the principles of too many of his correspondents: Mrs. Procter also destroyed a bundle of his letters, Grosvenor Lloyd burned all Charles Lloyd's papers, and not a line to Martin Burney seems to have survived.

We have little information concerning Mary Lamb's later days. In a letter to Jane Norris (afterwards Jane Tween), belonging probably to Christmas, 1841, Mary Lamb writes: "I long to shew you what a nice snug place I have got into—in the midst of a pleasant little garden. I have a room for myself and my old books on the ground floor, and a little bedroom up two pairs of stairs. When you come to town, if you have not time to go [to] the Moxons, an Omnibus from the Bell and Crown in Holborn would [bring] you to our door in [a] quarter of an hour. If your dear Mother does not venture so far, I will contrive to pop down to see [her]. Love and all seasonable wishes to your sister and Mary, &c. I am in the midst of many friends—Mr. & Mrs. Kenney, Mr. & Mrs. Hood, Bar[r]on Field & his brother Frank, & their wives &c., all within a short walk."

Mr. W. C. Hazlitt says that it was Miss Lamb's custom, when visiting her friends in St. John's Wood, to carry three or four empty snuff-boxes with her, which they were careful should be filled ere her departure. She also often would secrete in a large handkerchief whatever article particularly pleased her, and bear it home. Another glimpse of her we also have in a little paper of reminiscences written for me by the late Mrs. Edward FitzGerald. When visiting the Lambs at Colebrooke Cottage Mrs. FitzGerald (then Lucy Barton), as I have related in an earlier chapter, had noticed particularly the bookcase, which was



filled with ragged books to which the dealers' labels were still sticking with their inconsiderable prices marked on them. "I believe," she wrote in 1893, "that once again I saw that bookcase. I was taken by some friends to call on Miss Lamb after her brother's death. When I was introduced to her, a chair was placed for me close to her own. She took my hand, looked intently at me (my dress happened to be of blue muslin), and stroked down my skirts once or twice, saying, with a look of surprise and perhaps of slight reproach, '*Bernard Barton's daughter!*' But I think she soon forgave my un-Quakerly appearance, for she presently took my arm, and led me up to a bookcase, before which we paced up and down, now and then stopping to look at it, and even to touch it. Surely at that moment we both remembered Colebrook Row!"

Crabb Robinson records a visit to Mary Lamb in August, 1842, when he found her fully in possession of her faculties, and walked with her to Hood's; but in March, 1843, he describes her as a wreck of herself. She was however well enough in July of that year to instruct Miss James to write a letter expressing her sorrow at the death of Mrs. Randal Norris. Another old friend, Thomas Hood, died in 1845.

Mary Lamb lived to be eighty-two. She died on May 20th, 1847. Crabb Robinson thus describes the funeral, in a letter to his brother Thomas on May 29th: "Yesterday was a painfully interesting day. I attended the funeral of Mary Lamb. At nine a coach fetched me. We drove to her dwelling, at St. John's Wood, from whence two coaches accompanied the body to Edmonton, across a pretty country; but the heat of the day rendered the drive oppressive. We took refreshment at the house where dear Charles Lamb died, and were then driven to our homes." The mourners were Talfourd, Ryle, Moxon, Crabb Robinson, John Forster, Allsop, Mockshay, an uninvited guest, and Martin Burney who, to Robinson's annoyance, "shed tears." "There was no sadness" (with this unfortunate exception): "we all talked with warm affection of dear Mary Lamb, and that most delightful of creatures, her brother Charles,—of all the men of genius I ever knew, the one the most intensely and universally to be loved."

## INDEX

### A

- Abbott, Charles, M.P., Chief Secretary for Ireland, and Rickman, 188.  
 — — at Dublin, 214.  
 Abraham, Lamb on, 518.  
 Academy, Royal, and B. R. Haydon, 317.  
 Acrostics, Lamb's, 325, 595, 687.  
 — — his jesting advertisement for, 621.  
 Actors, Lamb's favourite early, 78.  
 — and acting, Lamb on, 191, 192, 193.  
 "Actors, The Old," by Lamb, in the *London Magazine*, 78, 191, 592.  
 Adam and the Garden of Eden, Lamb on, 561.  
 Adams, Dr. Joseph, biographer of Hunter, 310, 364.  
 — — — recommends Coleridge to Gillman, 364.  
 Addison, Joseph, discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.  
 — — and Hazlitt's essay writing, 445.  
 — Miss Mitford's comparison of, with Lamb, 532.  
 Aders, Mrs. Charles, and the Lambs, 425, 460, 461, 490, 528, 629.  
 Admirals, British, and Lamb, 651.  
*Adventures of Ulysses*, by Charles Lamb, 232, 283, 286, 292.  
 Agar, Ellis Wellbore, Lamb on his pictures, 268.  
 Agur's wish, and George Dyer, 145.  
 Aikin, Arthur, and Crabb Robinson's effort for Burnett, 306.  
 — Mrs. C., on Hazlitt and Lamb, 308.  
 — — and Lamb's slip, 465.  
 — Dr., and the Lambs, 227, 342, 343.  
 — Miss, her admiration of Lamb, 343.  
 Ainger, Canon, Mrs. Jane Tween's letter to, 83.  
 — — his suggestion concerning Captain Jackson, 205.  
 — — and Rickman's letters, 209.  
 — — and Miss M. L. Field's reminiscences of Lamb, 358.  
 — — and Mrs. Tween's letter on the Lambs, 487, 488.
- Ainger, Canon, and Mrs. Tonna's letter on J. B. Dibdin, 504.  
 Ainsworth, William Harrison, and Lamb, 536.  
 A Kempis, Thomas, 12, 17.  
 Albert Museum at Exeter and Lamb's South-Sea House receipt, 73.  
*Albion, The*, Lamb's connection with, 109, 110, 200, 214, 216, 220.  
 — — its editor described by Lamb, 199.  
*Album Verses*, by Charles Lamb, and the *Literary Gazette*, 513, 514, 625, 627.  
 — — and Southey's poem of praise, 514, 626.  
 — — published by Moxon, 624.  
 — — dedicated to Moxon, 625.  
 — — and the *Monthly Review*, 627.  
 — — and Mrs. Aders on Lamb's reason for publishing, 629.  
 — — Lamb's own review of, 635.  
 Albums, Lamb's poems for, 530, 586.  
 — Emma Isola's album, 604, 646.  
 Alcohol and Charles Lamb, 202, 219, 229, 258, 293, 302, 318, 331-340, 428, 430, 466, 469, 489, 519, 596, 622, 623, 639, 662, 670.  
 — — Robinson on, 331, etc., 662.  
 — — Talfourd on, 338.  
 — — De Quincey on, 466.  
 — — Julius Hare on, 469.  
 — — Mrs. Shelley on, 489.  
 — — Mrs. Procter on, 623.  
 — — Carlyle on, 639.  
 — — Fuller Russell on, 670.  
 (See also Beer).  
 Alfieri, Charles Lloyd's translation of, 355.  
*Alfred*, by Joseph Cottle, Lamb on, 185.  
 Alice W——, Lamb's first love for (see also Ann Simmons), 75.  
 — — Lamb's intercourse with, ended, 80, 81.  
 — — Lamb's description of, 83.  
 Allen, Robert, a contributor to Boyer's *Liber Aureus*, 56.  
 — — described by Lamb, 67.  
 — — — by Leigh Hunt, 67.

- Allen, Robert, introduces Coleridge to Southey, 67.  
 — — his tried jokes, 68.  
 — — an army surgeon, 207.  
 — William, editor of *The Philanthropist*, 339.
- Allsop, Thomas, the favourite disciple of Coleridge, 431.  
 — — his presents to Lamb, 431.  
 — — his *Conversations and Recollections of Coleridge*, 431.  
 — — his stories of Lamb, 431, 432, 433.  
 — — and the Chartists, 433.  
 — — his death, 433.  
 — — and Coleridge on Lamb, 453.  
 — — and Mary Lamb's illness, 1821, 465.  
 — — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.  
 — — at Lamb's evenings, 515.  
 — — his generosity to Coleridge, 515.  
 — — executor of Lamb's first will, 519.  
 — — on Manning's mysticism, 522, 523.  
 — — with the Lambs at Enfield, 550, 553.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, September 24th, 1825, 555.  
 — — — — to, December 5th, 1825, 555.  
 — — a ruined man, 576.  
 — — on Charles and Mary in the hour of need, 576.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, December 20th, 1827, 594.  
 — — at Lamb's funeral, 675.  
 — — at the Moxons with Mary Lamb, 684.  
 — — at Mary Lamb's funeral, 688.
- Allston, Washington, his stories of Lamb, 405.  
 "All's Well that Ends Well," Mary Lamb stuck fast in, 273.
- Alpha Road, St. John's Wood, No. 41, Mary Lamb's last home, 685.
- Alsager, T. M., and the Lambs, 354, 360, 373, 400, 515.  
 — — — Lamb's gift of his *Works* to, 405.  
 — — — his donation to the Godwin fund, 495.
- Amatonda*, by Anton Wall, translated by Crabb Robinson, 310.
- Ambleside, Charles and Mary Lamb at, 228.
- America, and Lamb's portrait of Milton, 477.  
 — and John Lamb's pamphlet on Humanity, 478, 479.
- "Amicus Redivivus" quoted, 144, 161, 496.
- Amiens, Mary Lamb's illness at, 489.
- Amwell and Lamb's walks, 486.
- Amyot, Thomas, meets Lamb, 307.
- Ancestry, The pride of, Lamb on, 30.  
 "Ancient Mariner, The," and Lamb, 142, 254, 305, 671.
- Ancient Mysteries*, Hone's, and Lamb, 551.
- Andrews, Mord, meets the Lambs, 310.
- Angerstein, John Julian, Lamb on his pictures, 268, 269.
- Anglers and Lamb, 575.
- Anna. See Alice W——, also Ann Simmons.
- Annual Anthology*, 1800, 117, 141, 161.  
 — *Review*, and *John Woodvil*, 226.
- Anti-Jacobin, The*, and Coleridge, Lloyd, Lamb & Co., 136, 628.  
 — — *Review and Magazine, The*, and Gillray's caricature, 136, 137, 138, 178.  
 — — — — its further attack on Lamb and his friends, 137.
- Antiquity, Lamb will write for, 607.
- "Antonio," by William Godwin, 179, 190.  
 — Lamb's account of the first performance, 191.
- Appreciations*, by Walter Pater, and Elia, 189, 448.
- Aram, Eugene, Hazlitt's wish to see, 386.
- Archer, Mr. William, his essay on Lamb quoted, 118.
- Ariel, Lamb as, 622.
- Ariosto, Titian's portrait of, 383.
- Aristotle and Shakespeare, Lamb's joke on, 306.
- Arnold, S. J., of the Lyceum, 236.  
 "Artaxerxes" ("My First Play"), 9, 43.
- Artevelde, Philip Van*, by Taylor, Lamb on, 671.
- Asbury, Jacob Vale, and Miss Isola Lamb, 621.  
 — — — Lamb's "apology" to, 622.
- Askew, Anthony, Dr., 144, 162.
- Athenæum, The*, Lamb's work in, 357.  
 — — Crabb Robinson's letter to, 501.  
 — — and Mrs. Coe's reminiscences of Lamb, 571.  
 — — and Procter on Lamb's good things, 573.  
 — — and FitzGerald's "Meadows in Spring," 635.  
 — — and Lamb's tribute to Munden 642.  
 — — and Lamb's essay on the "Barrenness of Imagination," etc., 647.  
 — — and Lamb's sonnet on the "Christian Names of Women," 648.  
 — — and the review of Moxon's sonnets 648.



- Athenaeum, The*, and Lamb's wedding verses to Moxon, 657.
- — and Lamb's "Thoughts on Presents of Game," 658.
- — Lamb's sonnet to Stothard, 659.
- — its request to Lamb on Coleridge's death, 666.
- Authoresses, Lamb on, 433.
- Authorship, Lamb on calamities in, 659.
- Autobiographical Fragment*, by B. W. Procter, 377, 647.
- *Recollections*, by C. R. Leslie, 501.
- Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, 50, 66, 77.
- Ayrton, William, his Vol. III. of Lamb's *Works*, 176, 237.
- — his relatives and career, 236.
- — Hazlitt on, 236.
- — his sister, Mrs. Paris, and Emma Isola, 237, 429.
- — at Lamb's party, 355.
- — and Lamb's letter in rhyme to, 371.
- — and Lamb's Thursday evenings, 374, 380, 381, 382, 384, 387.
- — Lamb's gift of his *Works* to, 405.
- — his donation to Godwin's fund, 495.
- — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- — Lamb on his "wit and wisdom," 629.
- — and Lamb's "Free Thoughts on Eminent Composers," 629, 630.
- Mrs., Mary Lamb's letter to, 1821, 466.
- B**
- "Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People, A," 304.
- Bacon, Lord, Ben Jonson on, 311.
- Badams, Mr., and Coleridge's pension, and Lamb, 633, 634.
- Louisa, Lamb's letter to, December 31st, 1832, 647.
- — — — to, February 15th, 1833, 648.
- — — — to, August, 1833, 656.
- The, at Enfield, and the Lambs, 644.
- Bakewell, Robert, the geologist, meets the Lambs at Robinson's, 307.
- Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, publishers of the *London Magazine*, 434, 436, 443.
- — — and the payment for *Elia*, 443, 500.
- Edward, Godwin's *nom-de-plume* for children's books, 256.
- Ball, Mr., an old friend of Mrs. Lamb, and Mary Lamb's illness, 239.
- Sir Alexander, Governor of Malta, and Coleridge, 275.
- Balmanno, Mrs., and her account of the Lambs in *Pen and Pencil*, 580, 581, 582.
- — the Lambs' visit to, and Lamb's way with his sister, 598, 599.
- — Mrs. Cowden Clarke's *Letters* to her son, 599.
- Bankrupts, Lamb on, 618.
- Bankside, Lamb's fondness for, 344.
- Bannister, Jack, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.
- "Barbara S——" quoted, 78.
- — and Miss Kelly, 412, 535.
- Barbauld, Mrs., her opinion of Lord Stanhope, 164.
- — Lamb's joke on, 180.
- — and Southey's error concerning *John Woodvil*, 226.
- — Lamb friendly with, 227.
- — on her books for children, 232.
- — and Lamb's "Mr. H.," 323.
- — Lamb on, 433.
- — her meeting with the Lambs in 1821, 465.
- — and Lamb, disputing with, 527.
- Barclay & Perkins, and Lamb, 580.
- — and Mrs. Cowden Clarke, 599.
- — and Miss Kelly, 599.
- Baring, Sir Francis, Chairman of the East India Company, 76.
- Barnes, Thomas, of *The Times*, 319.
- — on Lamb's Shakespeare essay, 320.
- — and Lamb, 322.
- Barnet, Lamb in the stocks at, 544.
- "Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art," 636, 647.
- Bartholomew Fair, Lamb and Wordsworth at, 229.
- Barton, Bernard, Lamb's letter to, on the *Pilgrim's Progress*, 9.
- — Lamb's letter to, April, 1825, 140, 141.
- — — — to, 1824, 311.
- — and Lamb and Shelley, 395.
- — and the *London Magazine*, 491, 492, 493, 494.
- — Lamb's first letter to, September 11th, 1822, 492.
- — first meeting with Lamb, 492, 493.
- — his sonnet to "Elia," 494.
- — Lamb's letter to, July 10th, 1823, 508.
- — — — to, September 2nd, 1823, 514.
- — his visit with his daughter to Lamb, 516.
- — Lamb's letter to, 1823, 518.
- — — — to, January 23rd, 1824, 520.
- — his testimonial, Lamb on, 524.

- Barton, Bernard, Lamb's letter to, May 15th, 1824, 525.  
 — — — — to, March, 1825, 529.  
 — — — — to, September 30th, 1824, 530.  
 — — — — to, December 1st, 1824, 532.  
 — — — — jesting anxiety for, 533.  
 — — — — letter to, February 10th, 1825, 536.  
 — — — — to, March 20th, 1826, 561.  
 — — — — to, May 16th, 1826, 561.  
 — — — — to, September 26th, 1826, 566.  
 — — his poem and Lamb, 586.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, June 3rd, 1829, 611.  
 — — — — to, July 25th, 1829, 611.  
 — — — — to, February 25th, 1830, 619, 620.  
 — — — — to, August, 1830, 626.  
 — — — — Latin letter to, 1831, 633.  
 — — — — gift of his *Last Essays of Elia*, 648.  
 "Barton, Emily," quoted, 39, 40, 44.  
 Barton, Lucy (Mrs. Edward FitzGerald), Bernard Barton's daughter, on her visit to Lamb, 516.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, December 1st, 1824 ("Saint Charles"), 533.  
 — — her album and Lamb, 534.  
 Bartram, Mr., the husband of Ann Simons, 83.  
 Bath, Lamb at, 365.  
 Beaumont, Sir George, his friendship for Haydon, 317.  
 — — — a friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge, 323.  
 — — Maria. See *Rosamund Gray*.  
 — — and Fletcher, Lamb destroys his book of extracts from, 104.  
 — — — — quoted by Lamb, 124.  
 — — — — the folio purchased, 171.  
 — — — — Lamb on, 386.  
 — — — — Lamb reading aloud, 670.  
*Beauty and the Beast* published by Godwin, 278.  
 Becky, the Lambs' servant, Talfourd on, 351.  
 — — at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 374.  
 — — Lamb on, and on her father, 583, 584.  
 — — her departure, 609, 612.  
 — — described by Patmore, 609, 610, 611.  
 — — her father, Lamb's kindness to, 610, 611.  
 Bedford, The Duke of, and Gillray's caricature, 136.  
 — — Grosvenor, Southey's letter to, December 3rd, 1819, 423.  
 Beer, Lamb on, 398.  
 — — and Lamb's walking measures, 580.  
 Beer and Lamb leaving Enfield, Cowden Clarke on, 580.  
 — — and Mrs. Cowden Clarke and Miss Kelly, 599.  
 — — and Christopher North, 643.  
 — — Lamb fetching, for his guests, 647, 650.  
 — — his abstemiousness in, Moxon on, 650, 651.  
 "Beggar Man, The," by John Lamb the younger, 297, 477.  
 Beggars, Lamb's generosity to, 574.  
 Bell, The, at Edmonton, Lamb dining at, with C. V. Le Grice, 1833, 655.  
 — — Lamb dining at, with Rickman and Godwin, 1833, 655.  
 — — and Lamb's last walk, 674.  
 Benevolence, Lamb on, 102.  
 Benger, Elizabeth Ogilvie, 180.  
 — — — described by Lamb, 181, 182.  
 Ben Jonson, his *Timber* quoted, 311.  
 Bensley, Robert, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.  
 Bensusan and Lamb, 545.  
 Benthamites, The, and Lamb's "Confessions of a Drunkard," 339.  
 Bentley, Mr., guardian of Miss Perry, Mary Lamb at his cottage, 399.  
 Betham, Anne, her legacy to Mary Lamb, 654.  
 — — Barbara, Mary Lamb's letter to, November 2nd, 1814, 346.  
 — — Mary, Lamb's letter to, June, 1833, 654, 655.  
 — — — — to, 1834, 660.  
 — — — — Matilda, reading to George Dyer at his death, 167.  
 — — — — Lamb's presents of books to, 288.  
 — — — — proposes to paint Lamb, 287.  
 — — — — her anecdotes of Lamb, 287.  
 — — — — at Lamb's, 411.  
 — — — — and Mary Lamb on Charles's kindness to young authors, 650.  
 Bethams, The (measureless), and Landor, Lamb on, 646.  
 Bible, The, Lamb's knowledge of, 50.  
*Bibliotheca Piscatoria*, by Thomas Westwood, 590.  
 Bickerstaffe, Isaac, his "Hypocrite," Miss Kelly in, 417.  
 Biggs (Coleridge's printer) and Lamb, 91.  
 Bigod, Ralph. See John Fenwick.  
*Bijou, The*, Lamb's contribution to, 593.  
 Billet, John, in "Poor Relations," 3, 14.  
 Bingley Hall, the home of the Lloyds, 139.  
*Biographia Literaria*, S. T. Coleridge quoted, 58.  
 Bird, William, the Lambs' schoolmaster, 40, 41, 42.

- Birmingham and the Lloyds, 109, 116, 121.
- Charles Lamb at, in 1798, 139.
- Lamb at, in 1818, 405.
- Birrell, Mr. Augustine, his *Obiter Dicta* quoted, 311.
- Bish, the Lottery contractor, 299.
- Bishop, Sir Henry, mentioned by Lamb, 403.
- Black, Mr. Algernon, and John Chambers's recollections of Lamb, 543.
- Blackwood's Magazine* and the *London Magazine*, 435, 436.
- — Lamb a contributor to, 436.
- — and Allan Cunningham, 441.
- — Lamb on, 497.
- — on the "Letter to Southey," 510.
- — and Mary Lamb's sonnet to Emma Isola, 585.
- — and Lamb's play, "The Wife's Trial," 603.
- — and Lamb's "Gypsy's Malison," 607.
- — and Lamb and the Cockneys, 688.
- Blair, Alexander, meets Lamb, 643.
- Blake, William, Lamb's admiration for, 311.
- — and Wainwright, 438, 526.
- — Lamb on, 525, 526.
- — his "Sweep Song" and Lamb, 525, 526.
- — his Chaucer's Pilgrims and Lamb, 596.
- "Blakesmoor in H—shire," 28, 29, 30, 83, 484, 531.
- Blakesware, 6, 20, 24, 28, 29, 31, 32, 35, 36, 83, 184, 575.
- Blandy, Miss, and Samuel Salt's blunder, 8.
- Blank Verse*, by Charles Lloyd and Charles Lamb, 6, 115, 122, 123, 126, 129.
- Blessington, Lady, and Landor on Lamb, 645.
- — and N. P. Willis, 663.
- — Landor's letter to, on Mary Lamb's genius, 683.
- "Blindness," by Mary Lamb (?), from *Poetry for Children*, 297.
- Bloomfield, Robert, author of "The Farmer's Boy," 518.
- Bloxam, Sam, and Lamb, 566.
- Blücher in England, 1814, 342.
- Lamb's want of interest in, 458.
- Blue-stockings, Lamb on, 181.
- Boccaccio, his *Decameron*, Hazlitt on, 382, 383.
- Bodleian Library, Lamb there, 184.
- Bolingbroke, Lord, and Pope, Lamb on, 384.
- Bookbinder, The, Lamb's cousin, Lamb at his funeral, 582, 583.
- — his idea of generosity, 593.
- Books, presentation copies, and Lamb, 589.
- Lamb's, 5, 589, 650.
- — Crabb Robinson on, 521, 608.
- — John Hollingshead on, 686.
- — Mrs. E. FitzGerald on, 687, 688.
- Booksellers (i.e. publishers) and authors, Lamb on, 499, 500.
- their failure, Lamb on our duty towards, 563.
- Booth's *Tables of Simple Interest*, 1818, and Lamb's comments, 545.
- "Borderers, The," by Wordsworth, 91.
- Borrow, George, his *Lavengro*, 208.
- — and Taylor of Norwich, 307.
- Boswell, James, his *Life of Johnson* discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.
- Bourne, Vincent, Lamb's eulogy of, 635.
- Bowring, Sir John, at Colebrooke, 529.
- Boyer, Rev. James, described by Lamb, 51, 53.
- — — Coleridge's jesting valediction, 54, 369.
- — — his *Liber Aureus*, 54.
- — — and handwriting, 57.
- — — described by Coleridge, 58.
- — — his death, 59.
- — — described by Leigh Hunt, 59.
- — — his injustice, 59.
- — — his first interest in Coleridge, 69.
- — — his favourite joke, 223.
- — Mrs., Coleridge's story of, 59.
- Braham, John, Lamb on, 286, 287.
- — his singing and Lamb, 344, 345.
- — Lamb like his own description of, 351.
- Brawn, Lamb's praise of, 260, 261.
- Brent, Miss (sister of Mrs. Morgan), and Mary Lamb seeking lodgings, 368.
- — and the Lambs, 372.
- Bridget Elia. See Mary Lamb.
- Bridgewater, The widow, and Hazlitt, 521.
- Brighton, Mary Lamb on, 372.
- — and the Lambs' visit to France, 487.
- Bristol and Coleridge, 79, 88, 89, 92, 109, 137, 180.
- — and Chatterton, 365.
- British Ladies' Magazine, The*, and Mary Lamb's article, 348.
- British Museum and Lamb's copy of Dyer's *Poems*, 155.
- — and Lamb, 283, 286.
- — the MS. attributed by Patmore to Lamb, 293.
- — and Cary, 437.



- British Museum and Bernard Barton's letters, 493.
- — — and Lamb's work there, 567, 568, 623.
- Brome, Richard, his "Jovial Crew" and Miss Kelly, 417.
- Brougham, Lord, defends Hunt at his trial, 322.
- — — and Coleridge's pension, 634, 635.
- Browne, Sir Thomas, Walter Pater on, 189.
- — — and Burnett's *Specimens of Prose*, 209.
- — — his *Religio Medici*, 259.
- — — Lamb's wish to see, 379, 381.
- — — his place in literature, 443.
- — — a favourite of Lamb's, 568.
- "Brownie's Cell, The," by Wordsworth, Wordsworth on, 428.
- Broxbourne, 36.
- Brutons, The, Lamb on, 23, 356.
- Bruton, Miss Sarah, a descendant of Lamb's relations, 23.
- Buchan, The Earl of, biographer of Fletcher of Saltoun, and George Dyer call on Lamb, 224.
- Buffam, The Misses, the Lambs lodging with, 628.
- Bulwer (Lord Lytton) and Lamb, 673.
- Buncl, John, mentioned by Hazlitt, 378.
- Bungay, Lamb on, 673.
- Buntingford, Lamb's property at 325.
- Bunyan, John, discussed at Lamb's evenings, 385, 386.
- Bürger, Taylor's translations of, 307.
- Burke, Edmund, Lamb's gift of his *Works* to Crabb Robinson, 369.
- Burnett, George, and Pantisocracy, 67, 207.
- — — introduced by Southey to Coleridge, 207.
- — — his different occupations, 207.
- — — his pride and impracticability, 208, 209.
- — — his *Specimens of English Prose-Writers to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, 209.
- — — his miserable death, 1811, 210, 307, 499.
- Burney, Dr., his work on music, and Lamb, 629.
- — — Charles, his death, and Martin Burney and Lamb, 400.
- — — Captain James, the beginning of his friendship with Lamb, 233.
- — — his pun in the Otaheité language, 233.
- — — on Shakespeare, 233.
- — — with the Lambs in the Isle of Wight, 242.
- Burney, Captain James, on Lamb's seamanship, 242.
- — — and Lamb's evenings, 279, 355, 369, 373, 379, 383, 515.
- — — a social evening at his house, 303.
- — — and Robinson's annual turkey, 315.
- — — his smoking, 339.
- — — at Rickman's, 341.
- — — described in Lamb's "Wedding Day," 462, 463.
- — — his death, 463, 465.
- — — and Lamb's regrets for, 485.
- — — Leigh Hunt's recollection of, 515.
- — — Fanny (Madame D'Arblay), sister of Captain Burney, 233.
- — — Martin Charles, Lamb's bondsman at the India House, 76.
- — — his intimacy with the Lambs, 234.
- — — Lamb's joke on, 234.
- — — described by Southey, 1804, 234.
- — — by Procter, 235.
- — — his taste in books, 235.
- — — Leigh Hunt's story of, and Lamb, 235.
- — — the prose portion of Lamb's *Works* dedicated to, 235.
- — — Lamb describes his oddities to Sarah Hazlitt, 235.
- — — his conception of a barrister's duties, 236.
- — — his misfortune in later years, 236.
- — — and Lamb's card-table joke, 237.
- — — his pranks in the Isle of Wight, 242.
- — — his attempts at authorship, 271.
- — — at Winterslow, 298.
- — — at Lamb's, 355, 362.
- — — in Lamb's nonsense letter to Manning, 363.
- — — on Hazlitt's attack on Coleridge, 367.
- — — and Lamb's Thursday evenings, 373, 375, 380, 383, 400.
- — — Lamb's manner to, 376.
- — — his uncle's death and Lamb's joke, 400.
- — — a clerk at the House of Commons, 421.
- — — and the Lambs' kindness, 466.
- — — Leigh Hunt's recollections of, 515.
- — — needing new occupation, 539.
- — — at Lamb's in 1827, 576.
- — — and Mary Lamb at Enfield, Westwood on, 590.

- Burney, Martin Charles, and Sergeant Wilde's election campaign, 618.
- — — Crabb Robinson on his disgraceful grief at Mary Lamb's funeral, 688.
- Sarah, wife of Captain Burney, probably the original of Sarah Battle, 233.
- — at Richmond with Mary Lamb, 312.
- — at cards, Lamb on, 624.
- — (the daughter), her marriage and "The Wedding," 461, 462, 463.
- Burrell, Miss, her singing mentioned by Lamb, 402.
- Burton, Robert, his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Lamb's imitations of, 179, 180, 235, 252.
- — and Lamb reading, 259.
- — a favourite of Lamb's, 568.
- in Hampshire, Lamb at, 121.
- — — Southey living at, 141.
- Bury St. Edmunds, Charles and Mary at, 283.
- — — Coleridge at, 288.
- Button, Eliza, cousin of Charles Lamb, 325.
- Snap, Lamb's Hertfordshire property, 325.
- Bye, Tommy, and his drunkenness, 338, 411, 412.
- — his poems, Lamb on, 407.
- Byron, Lord, his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 138.
- — and Jane Clairmont, 212.
- — and Coleridge's "Christabel," 364.
- — his donation to Godwin, 495.
- — his death, Lamb on, 526.
- — his "Vision of Judgment," Lamb on, 670.
- — and Charles and Mary Lamb "hating," 670.
- C
- Cæsars, The Twelve, at Blakesware, 26, 34, 35, 36.
- Caleb Williams, by William Godwin, 179.
- Calne, The Lambs' visit to, 363, 365.
- Cambridge, George Dyer at, 144, 158.
- the Lambs' first meeting with Emma Isola at, 237.
- and brawn, 260.
- Barnes at, 319.
- Mary Lamb on their visit to, 359, 360, 361.
- Lamb on, 361.
- the Lambs and Crabb Robinson at, 428.
- Campbell, James Dykes, his remarks on Boyer's *Liber Aureus*, 55, 56.
- — — on the quarrel of Coleridge and Lloyd, 129.
- — — on the date of "Kubla Khan," 130.
- — — on Coleridge's return from Malta, 275.
- — — on the breach between Coleridge and Wordsworth, 323, 324.
- — — and Mrs. Procter's letters, 623.
- — — on Coleridge's pension, 634, 635.
- Thomas, his "Pleasures of Hope" and Lamb's "New Year's Eve," 460.
- Canning, George, his satire in *The Anti-Facobin*, 136.
- — Lamb's epigrams on, in *The Champion*, 138, 426.
- Canonbury Tower and Lamb, 517, 518.
- "Captain Jackson," 203, 204, 205.
- Caracci and John Lamb, 474.
- Carisbrook Castle, Captain Burney on, 242.
- Carlisle, Sir Anthony, and Coleridge's drug habit, 302.
- Carlyle, Thomas, and Mrs. Montagu, 272.
- — and Lamb, 454.
- — his visit to Lamb, 1824, 528.
- — his friend Badams, 607.
- — his visit to Lamb, 1831, and his account of, 638, 639, 640.
- — his denial of Lamb's humour, 640.
- — his *Reminiscences* and the Lambs, 640, 641.
- — his letter to Procter on his memoir of Lamb, 641.
- Carr, Mr., speaks Lamb's prologue to Coleridge's "Remorse," 326.
- Carter, Ben, gardener at Blakesware, 37.
- Cary, Rev. Henry Francis, and Lamb, 437, 438.
- — — his translation of Dante, 437.
- — — Coleridge's meeting with, 437.
- — — his post at the British Museum, 437.
- — — his contributions to the *London*, 437.
- — — Lamb on, 437.
- — — his pun, 438.
- — — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- — — Lamb's letter to, October 14th, 1823, 519.
- — — monthly visit to, 1834, 623.
- — — letter to, 1834, 623.
- — — to, April 13th, 1831, 632.

- Cary, Rev. Henry Francis, Lamb's letter (in Latin) to, 1831, 633.  
 — — — — his translation of Dante and the Lambs, 648.  
 — — — — Lamb dines with, 662.  
 — — — — his Phillips's *Theatrum Poetarum* and Lamb, 674, and footnote.  
 — — — — his "Lines to the Memory of Charles Lamb," 674, footnote.  
 — — — — his lines on Lamb's tombstone, 679, 680, 688.  
 — — — — at the Moxons, with Mary Lamb, 684.  
 Chalk Farm, Scott's duel at, 435.  
 Chambers, John, Lamb's letter to, 1818, 407.  
 — — — — correspondence with, 543.  
 — — — — his recollections of Lamb, 534, 544.  
 — — — — Rev. Thomas, and Lamb on "Presents of Game," 544.  
*Champion, The*, Lamb's political epigrams in, 223, 426, 427.  
 — — — — the office, Lamb and Haydon at, 318.  
 — — — — and Lamb's *Works*, 406.  
 — — — — and John Scott, 434.  
 Chapel Street, Pentonville, the Lambs move to No. 45, 111.  
 — — — — Charles and Mary Lamb move to No. 36, 170.  
 — — — — Coleridge staying there, 180.  
 — — — — Miss Benger visits the Lambs, 181.  
 — — — — Lamb's sad reasons for leaving, 183.  
 — — — — Lamb's four years' exile, 189.  
 Chapman, George, his translation of Homer and Lamb, 232, 283, 286, 568.  
 "Chapter on Ears, A," 344, 397, 398.  
*Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, by Hazlitt, 388.  
 Charles I., Mrs. Mathews on Lamb's likeness to, 464.  
 — — — — of Sweden and John Lamb, Lamb on, 473.  
 Chase Side, Enfield, Hood on, 579.  
 — — — — Lamb's description of, 587.  
 — — — — Thomas Westwood's description of, 588, 589, 590.  
 — — — — Crabb Robinson on, 593, 594.  
 Chasles, Philarète, the French critic, his description of Lamb in 1818, 407, 408.  
 Chateaubriand and Lamb, 584.  
 Chatterton, Thomas, his forgeries, Lamb's pun on, 341.  
*Chaucer, Life of*, by William Godwin, Lamb on his promised review of, 244.  
 Chaucer and the Temple, 382.  
 — — — — his *Canterbury Tales*, 382, 383.  
 — — — — his "Legend of Good Women" and Lamb's evenings, 386.  
 Cheshunt, Lamb on, 486.  
 Chiabrera, and Wordsworth's epitaph on Lamb, 676.  
 Childhood, Lamb on, 29, 31.  
 Children, The punishment of, Lamb on, 41.  
 — — — — and Lamb, 248, 398, 399, 572, 574, 575.  
 Childs, Mr., of Bungay, Lamb's letter to, 1834, 672, 673.  
 — — — — his gift of a turkey and Lamb's last hours, 675.  
 "Chimney Sweepers, The Praise of," quoted, 86, 87.  
 China, Lamb's wish to be known there, 673.  
 Chippenham, Lamb at, 365.  
 Chitty, Joseph, and Talfourd, 350.  
 "Christabel," by S. T. Coleridge, 364.  
 — — — — Lamb quoting, 404.  
 — — — — and Lamb's suggested alteration, 432.  
 — — — — and Lamb, 671.  
 Christianity and Lamb, 328, 453, 457.  
 Christie, Jonathan Henry, and the duel with Scott, 435.  
 Christie's and John Lamb, 474.  
*Christmas*, by Edward Moxon, dedicated to Lamb, 625, footnote.  
 Christ's Hospital, Samuel Salt's influence there, 8.  
 — — — — the food, 19, 48.  
 — — — — Lamb's entry in 1782, 46.  
 — — — — list of holidays, 48.  
 — — — — described by Leigh Hunt, 50.  
 — — — — the *Liber Aureus* of, 54.  
 — — — — the Coleridge Memorial, 69.  
 — — — — the Lamb Medal, 69.  
 — — — — demolition of, 69.  
 — — — — and the memory of Lamb, 69.  
 — — — — Lamb's visits to, after he had left, 77.  
 — — — — and James White, 85.  
 — — — — George Dyer at, 144.  
 — — — — and Henry Field, 357.  
 "Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago," 19, 47, 48, 51, 52, 53, 54, 62, 66, 67, 436.  
*Chronicle, Morning*, its report of the tragedy of September 22nd, 1796, 94, footnote.  
 — — — — and Lamb's connection with, 214, 215.  
 — — — — and Coleridge, 92.  
 — — — — Hazlitt reporter to, 330.  
*Chronicle of the Compleat Angler*, by Thomas Westwood, 575, 590, 591.



- Chronological History of the Discoveries in the South Sea and Pacific Ocean*, by James Burney, 233.
- Church, St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street, 39, 650.
- — — — George Dyer married at, 166.
- Churches and Mary Lamb, 361.
- Clairmont, Jane, and Byron, 212.
- Clapton and the Lambs' walks, 365.
- Clare, Allan. See *Rosamund Gray*.
- Elinor. See *Rosamund Gray*.
- John, and the *London Magazine*, 440.
- — his sonnet on Lamb, 441, footnote.
- — Lamb's letter to, 1822, 488.
- — at Colebrooke, 529.
- Claret and Lamb, 293, 294.
- Clarke, Charles Cowden, his father and George Dyer in 1791, 148.
- — — his story of his mother and Dyer's chivalry, 149.
- — — on George Dyer, 164, 166.
- — — and Barnes' joke on babies, 320, footnote.
- — — on his wife's recollection of Miss Kelly, 418.
- — — his story of Charles and Mary and her dying first, 519.
- — — on Lamb, and Barclay & Perkins, 580.
- — — his description of Lamb, 600, 601; and of Mary, 601, 602.
- — — and his copy of Procter's memoir of Lamb, 602, footnote.
- — — edits Nyren's *Young Cricketer's Tutor*, 603.
- — — his death, 603.
- — — Lamb's letter to, June, 1834, 665, 666.
- John (father of Charles Cowden Clarke) and George Dyer, 148.
- — his school at Enfield, 602.
- Mrs. Cowden (Victoria Novello) on Keats, Leigh Hunt, Shelley, and Lamb, 395.
- — — her parentage, 396.
- — — her death, 397.
- — — her father and Lamb's *Tales from Shakespear*, 397.
- — — on Lamb and the jar of ginger, 398, 399.
- — — on mutual entertainments of the Lambs and the Hunts, 399.
- — — taught Latin by Mary Lamb, 417.
- — — her recollection of Miss Kelly, 418.
- — — and the Elia anagram, 442, footnote.
- Clarke, Mrs. Cowden, on the Lambs at Margate, 464.
- — — on Lamb shopping, 574.
- — — her *Letters to an Enthusiast*, and Lamb at Enfield, 599, 600.
- — — on Lamb and porter, 599.
- — — her death, 602.
- — — her *Concordance to Shakespear*, 602.
- Clarkes, The Cowden, and Mary Lamb's pun on Munden, 527.
- — — their honeymoon at Enfield and the Lambs, 596.
- — — with the Lambs at Enfield, 596, 597.
- — — on Lamb at home, 597.
- — — on Lamb's playful bluntness, 597, 598.
- — — and Lamb and the obtrusive dog, 600.
- — — and Lamb's kindness to a donkey, 600.
- Clarkson, Thomas, promise of a turkey, 293.
- — and the Negro Creation, 475.
- — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- — the memorial to, Lamb on, 585.
- Mrs., Mary Lamb's letter to, December, 1806, 278.
- — introduces Crabb Robinson to the Lambs, 279.
- — and Mary Lamb's letter to, December, 1808, 288, 289.
- — her illness, Mary Lamb on, 303.
- Clarksons, The, the Lambs staying with, 228, 272.
- — their letter on the Lambs in 1807, 283.
- — the Lambs' visit to, at Bury St. Edmunds, 283.
- — Coleridge's visit to, 288.
- Claude, Lamb on, 268.
- and his landscapes discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.
- and John Lamb, Lamb on, 474.
- Clemitson, innkeeper at Widford, 37.
- Clerkenwell, St. James's, the burial place of Sarah Lamb, 114.
- Clerks, at the South-Sea House, Lamb on, 74.
- at the India House, and Lamb on, 542.
- at the India House, and Lamb, Mr. Ogilvie's stories of, 544, 545.
- Clifford's Inn, Dyer's abode, 149, 674.
- Cobbett, W., John Lamb compared to, 481.
- Cockneys and *Blackwood's Magazine*, 435, 436.

- Coe, Mrs. (*née* Elizabeth Hunt of Widford), her recollections of Blakesware, 29.
- — her recollections of Lamb, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575.
- Colburn, Henry, his *New Monthly Magazine*, and Lamb's "Popular Fallacies," 555.
- — Lamb giving up writing for, 564.
- Zerah, the American mathematical prodigy, 423, footnote.
- Colebrooke Cottage, Islington, described by Lamb, 513, 514.
- — in the present day, 516.
- — Lucy Barton's visit to, 516.
- — Hood on, 516.
- — lent to Hone, 550.
- — Lamb's illness at, 555.
- — and S. Y.'s account of an evening at, 555.
- — account of the Lambs at, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 567.
- — Lamb on leaving, 587.
- Coleridge, Derwent, his pet name Pypos, 248, footnote.
- Edward, nephew of S. T. Coleridge, and Lamb, 555.
- Mr. E. H., and his edition of Coleridge's letters, 324.
- Hartley, born, 109.
- — with his parents in London, 174.
- — called the Philosopher by Lamb, 178.
- — and Lamb on children's books, 231.
- — and Lamb's *Confessions of a Drunkard*, 340.
- — on Lamb, 444.
- Samuel Taylor, letter of Lamb to, on the Lamb family, 6.
- — — Lamb's letter to, in 1796, on *The Compleat Angler*, 9.
- — — enters Christ's Hospital, 47.
- — — on Christ's Hospital fare, 50.
- — — his pious ejaculation on Boyer's death, 54.
- — — his contributions to Boyer's *Liber Aureus*, 54.
- — — evades a Grecian's destiny, 56.
- — — and Boyer, 58, 59.
- — — his wit-combats, 62.
- — — Lamb's first letter to, 1796, 64, 81.
- — — Le Grice's reminiscences of, 65.
- — — and Pantisocracy, 67, 84.
- — — his first meeting with Southey, 67.
- — — and his Memorial at Christ's Hospital, 69.
- — — in love with Mary Evans, 79.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, engaged to Sarah Fricker, 79.
- — — his sonnets with Lamb, 79.
- — — his lines on Mary Lamb's illness, 1794, 79, 80.
- — — and Lamb's sonnets, 81, 82.
- — — and Southey and Robert Lovell, 84.
- — — brought back to Sarah Fricker by Southey, 84.
- — — introduces Lamb to Southey, 1795, 84.
- — — his *Vision* and Southey's *Foan of Arc*, 88.
- — — Lamb's generosity to, 88.
- — — his displeasure with Southey, 88.
- — — his "Religious Musings," 89.
- — — and Wordsworth's "Descriptive Sketches," 90.
- — — fortifies Lamb in Unitarianism, 90.
- — — "improves" Lamb's sonnets, 91.
- — — and the *Chronicle*, 92.
- — — his letter to Lamb on the tragedy of September 22nd, 1796, 95.
- — — his second consolatory letter to Lamb, 100.
- — — his quarrel with Southey, 103.
- — — his lines on Lamb's renouncing poetry, 105.
- — — takes Charles Lloyd for a pupil, 109.
- — — and *The Watchman*, 109.
- — — his son born, 1796, 109.
- — — on Lloyd's attractions, 109.
- — — sends Lamb Lloyd's volume of poems and his collection of sonnets, 110.
- — — his silence to Lamb, 115.
- — — his breach with Lloyd, 115.
- — — and Lloyd's departure, 116.
- — — visited by Lamb at Stowey, 116.
- — — writes "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," 117.
- — — Hazlitt's description of, 118.
- — — on Dorothy Wordsworth, 119.
- — — and Lamb's poem on the anniversary of his mother's death, 121.
- — — his renewed silence, 124.
- — — and his Higginbottom sonnets, 124, 131.
- — — and "The Old Familiar Faces," 129.
- — — his quarrel with Lamb and Lloyd, 1798, 129.

- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, composes "Kubla Khan" under the influence of opium, 130.
- — — portrayed in *Edmund Oliver*, 130.
- — — his letter of remonstrance to Lamb, 131, 132, 141.
- — — goes to Germany with the Wordsworths, 1798, 132.
- — — the quarrel made up, 134.
- — — Lamb's dedication of his *Works* to, 1818, 134.
- — — his affection for Charles and Mary Lamb, 134.
- — — described in Lloyd's "Desultory Thoughts," 135.
- — — and *The Anti-Jacobin* attacks, 136, 137.
- — — and *Rosamund Gray*, 139.
- — — separates from Wordsworth and his sister in Germany, 1798, 142.
- — — his "Ancient Mariner," Lamb's praise of, 142.
- — — his return from Germany, 174.
- — — at 21 Buckingham Street, Strand, 1799, 174.
- — — and the *Morning Post*, 174.
- — — introduces Lamb to Godwin, 178.
- — — with Lamb, 1800, 179.
- — — urges Lamb to literary work, 179.
- — — sends his family to Bristol, 179.
- — — his Schiller translations, 179.
- — — at Grasmere, 1800, 179.
- — — and Lamb's play, 180.
- — — and the Blue-stockings, 180, 181.
- — — on Lamb's fine qualities, 183.
- — — and Lamb's criticism of the *Lyrical Ballads*, 198.
- — — and George Burnett, 207.
- — — and *John Woodvil*, 214.
- — — Lamb's visit to, at Keswick, 1802, 227.
- — — suggests versified translations to Lamb, 232.
- — — staying with the Lambs, 1803, 239.
- — — a witness of Mary Lamb's illness, 239.
- — — Lamb's letter to, on smoking, 239.
- — — his restless state, 1803, 245.
- — — his plan for Malta, 245, 246.
- — — on Godwin and Mary Lamb's punch, 246.
- — — at Valetta, 1804, 246.
- — — introduces Hazlitt to Lamb, 248.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, his portrait painted by Hazlitt, 248.
- — — and Mary Lamb's lines on Captain Wordsworth, 258.
- — — his career in Malta, 274, 275.
- — — his return to England, 1806, 274.
- — — with the Lambs, 275.
- — — Mr. Dykes Campbell on, 275.
- — — and his wife, 275.
- — — at the office of *The Courier*, 1806, 276.
- — — J. P. Collier on, 280, 281.
- — — on Wordsworth and Shakespeare, 287.
- — — in 1807, 288.
- — — De Quincey's gift to, 288.
- — — his lectures, 288.
- — — separated from his wife, 288.
- — — and *The Friend*, 288.
- — — *The Friend* appears, 1809, 294.
- — — with the Montagus, 302.
- — — with the Morgans, 302.
- — — *The Friend* ended, 1810, 302.
- — — and Sir Anthony Carlisle, 302.
- — — on Shakespeare's plays, 303.
- — — his lectures, 1811, and J. P. Collier, 307.
- — — Crabb Robinson on, 307, 308, 314.
- — — and Burnett's death, 1811, 307, 308.
- — — on his troubles, 308.
- — — on Lamb's conversation, 309.
- — — recommended to Gillman by Dr. Adams, 310.
- — — Lamb on, 311, 314, 318.
- — — his lecture on "Romeo and Juliet," 313, 314.
- — — his breach with Wordsworth, Lamb on, 323.
- — — leaves Montagu's for the Morgans', 324.
- — — reconciled with Wordsworth through Robinson, 1812, 324.
- — — his letter to Lamb, 324.
- — — and Mr. Perceval's assassination, 1812, 324.
- — — his tragedy "Remorse" at Drury Lane, 1813, 326.
- — — borrowing Crabb Robinson's books, 345.
- — — and Lamb's nonsense letter to Manning, 1815, 363.
- — — and his "Zapolya," 363.
- — — at a chemist's, 1816, 363, 364.
- — — a patient at Gillman's, 1816, 364.
- — — his "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan," 364.



- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, "an Archangel a little damaged," 364.
- — — Hazlitt's attack of, Lamb on, 365, 366, 367.
- — — on John Lamb knocking down Hazlitt, 367, 476.
- — — his joke on Boyer's death, and Lamb, 369.
- — — and Wordsworth's *Excursion*, 372.
- — — his talk, Hazlitt on, 380.
- — — his lectures, 1818, and Lamb, 401, 402, 407.
- — — and Washington Allston, 405.
- — — his friend Morgan, 423.
- — — and Allsop, 431.
- — — and his landlord's entreaty, 432.
- — — and his "Christabel" and Lamb, 432.
- — — and Irving, Lamb on, 432.
- — — and Cary, 437.
- — — on Lamb's Christianity, 453.
- — — and Lamb's meeting with Charles Mathews, 1821, 464.
- — — his "Remorse" and Lamb's library, 479.
- — — and "a Man of the World," 484, 485.
- — — and his anonymous pig, 485.
- — — his wife and daughter's visit to, 1823, 500, 501.
- — — his brilliancy at Monkhouse's dinner-party, 1823, 502, 503.
- — — Crabb Robinson on, 502.
- — — Lamb on, 503.
- — — and a projected excursion with the Lambs, 504.
- — — and the story of Lamb's stammering, 507.
- — — In the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- — — his "Devil's Walk" and Hood, 516.
- — — his party, Crabb Robinson on, 528.
- — — and Edward Irving, 528.
- — — and his nephew Edward, 555.
- — — an evening with, and Lamb, S. Y. on, 555.
- — — contrasted with Lamb, 556, 557.
- — — on Leonardo's "Modestia et Vanitas," 558.
- — — and the Lambs' mutual affection, 559.
- — — his vast reading, 568.
- — — his pension, and Lamb's exertions for, 633, 634, 635.
- — — and Emerson's visit to, 1833, 637.
- — — and his hostility to Unitarianism, 637.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, his death, 1834, 666, 667, 669.
- — — his nurse, Lamb's generosity to, 666.
- — — his "Lime-Tree Bower" and dying inscription in, 667.
- — — his will and the Lambs, 667.
- — — Lamb's praise of, 667.
- — — Lamb's jokes concerning, 667, 668.
- — — and the *Table Talk* and Lamb, 667, footnote.
- — — on Lamb's character and genius, 668.
- — — on Wordsworth and Southey, 668.
- — — and Lamb's attachment to, Wordsworth on, 677.
- Sara (Mrs.), Lamb's verses to, 92.
- — Lamb's invitation to, 178.
- — and Lamb and Godwin's first meeting, 179.
- — and Coleridge's unhappy state, 245.
- — Mary Lamb's letter to, 248.
- — and Miss Betham's miniature of, 287.
- Sara (S. T. C.'s daughter), and Miss Betham's miniature of, 287.
- — her visit to her father, 500, 501.
- — and the *History of the Abipones*, 500, 501.
- — Lamb on, 500, 501.
- — her *Phantasmion*, 501.
- — and her father's monologues, 501.
- — and Mary Lamb's sonnet to Emma Isola, 585, footnote.
- Collier, John Dyer, his home at Hatton Garden, Lamb's visit to, 280.
- Mrs., and Lamb and Coleridge's visit to, 280, 281.
- — at Covent Garden with Lamb, 309.
- — and Robinson's turkey, 315.
- — her eel soup, 478.
- — (and Mr.), Lamb's letter to, January 6th, 1823, 497.
- — her gift of a pig, 531.
- John Payne, introduced to Lamb by Crabb Robinson, 280.
- — — his *Old Man's Diary*, 280.
- — — on Lamb's visit to, 280, 281.
- — — and on Coleridge, 280, 281.
- — — and Coleridge's Shakespearian lectures, 307.
- — — at Barron Field's, 322.
- — — at Lamb's, 355.
- — — his *Poet's Pilgrimage*, Lamb on, 497, 498.
- — — and the Lambs at W. Harness's, 643.

- Collins, William, his "Ode to the Passions" imitated, 137.  
 — — R.A., at Coleridge's, 528.  
 Colman, George, and "Mr. H.," 278.  
 Comberbach, Private Silas Tomkyn, Coleridge's assumed name, 130.  
 "Common Lot, The," by James Montgomery, Lamb's admiration for, 635, 671.  
 Commonplace Book, Charles Lamb's, and John Lamb's letters to *The Examiner*, 480, 481.  
 Companion, *The*, and Leigh Hunt, 569.  
 Compleat Angler, *The*, recommended by Lamb to Coleridge, 9.  
 — — — and Miss Isola's drawings, 590.  
 — — — Lamb's copy of, 591.  
 — — — Westwood's remarks on, 575, 590, 591.  
 Complete Concordance to *Shakespeare*, by Mrs. Cowden Clarke, 602.  
 "Conciones ad Populum," by S. T. Coleridge, 137.  
 "Confessions of a Drunkard," 202, 203, 240.  
 — — — — Robinson on, 326.  
 — — — — its four respective issues, 331.  
 — — — — quoted, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335.  
 — — — — reason for reprinting in 1822, 335, 336.  
 — — — — the *Quarterly Review* on, 336.  
 — — — — Lamb on the 1822 reprint of, 336.  
 — — — — the untruth of, 337, 338.  
 — — — — the facts of, 338.  
 — — — — Mr. Thomas Hutchinson on, 339.  
 — — — — as a teetotal tract in 1854, 339.  
 — — — — and Vindicator's protest, 339, 340.  
 — — — — and Hartley Coleridge, 339.  
 — — — — and the *Quarterly Review*, Lamb on, 513.  
 — — — — and Charles's joke on Mary Lamb, 664.  
 "Confessions of H. F. V. Delamore, Esq.," 544.  
 "Confidant, The," by Crabbe, and Lamb's "The Wife's Trial," 584.  
 "Convalescent, The," and Lamb's illness, 550.  
 Cook, Captain, and Captain Burney's voyages with, 233, 236.  
 Cooper, Fenimore, his novels and Mary Lamb, Charles on, 664.  
 Corn Laws, John Lamb on, 480, 481, 482.  
 Cornwall, Barry. See B. W. Procter.  
 Correggio, Lamb on, 261, 310.  
 Corry, Isaac, Southey secretary to, 188.  
 Cottle, Amos, his death, Lamb on, 185.  
 — — Joseph, of Bristol, publishes Coleridge and Southey, 88.  
 — — — his *Reminiscences*, 88, 119.  
 — — — publishes Lloyd's *Poems on the Death of Priscilla Farmer*, 110.  
 — — — Coleridge's letter to, on the Higginbottom Sonnets, 124.  
 — — — and Lloyd's request to Coleridge, 129.  
 — — — his endeavours to be peacemaker, 130.  
 — — — his *Annual Anthology*, 141.  
 — — — publisher of *Lyrical Ballads*, 142.  
 — — — Lamb's visit of condolence to, 185.  
 — — — his resemblance to Uncle Toby, 185.  
 — — — his poem "Alfred," Lamb on, 185.  
 Coulson, John, of the *Morning Chronicle*, at Lamb's party, 355.  
 — — Walter, meets Procter at Hunt's, 377.  
 Country, the, and Lamb, 614, 671.  
 Courier, *The*, Coleridge's work for, 245, 276, 288.  
 Courtney, Lord, his description of Le Grice, 64.  
 Coutts, Mrs. (*née* Harriet Mellon), and the fund for Godwin, 494.  
 Covent Garden Theatre, Lamb at, 309.  
 — — Lamb on, 390.  
 Coventry, Thomas, described by Lamb, 70, 71.  
 — — — and Joseph Paice, 71.  
 Coverley, Sir Roger de, and *Elia*, 645.  
 Cowes, the Lambs and the Burneys at, 242.  
 Cowley, Abraham, and Lord Brooke, 386.  
 Cowper, William, Lamb's lines on, 92.  
 — — — and Sharpe's *Essays*, Lamb on, 671.  
 — — — the memorial to, in Edmonton Churchyard, 680.  
 Cox, Mr. H. F., on Charles Lamb at Edmonton, 653, 654.  
 Crabbe, George, his "Confidant" and Lamb's "Wife's Trial," 584.  
 Craig, W. J., his conversation with Mrs. Coe, 571.  
 Critical Review, 92.  
 Cromwell, Oliver, and Lamb's Thursday evenings, 386.  
 Crown Office Row, No. 2, where Charles Lamb was born, 1.  
 Cruikshank, Dr., Lamb's visit to, 120.  
 — — — and John Lamb's injury, 471.  
 — — — George, and Hone, 550, 551.  
 Cumberland's *British Theatre*, edited by George Daniel, 516.

- Cunningham, Allan, and the *London Magazine*, 441.  
 — — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.  
 — — on Scott's walking, 580.  
 — — and *Elia* in America, 603.  
 "Curious Fragments from Burton," by Charles Lamb, 180.  
 "Curse of Kehama," by Southey, Lamb on, 305, 392.  
 Curtis, Alderman, Lamb's story of, 526.
- D**
- "Daffodils," by Wordsworth, and Crabb Robinson, 344.  
 Dale, Dr., and Dyer's phrenesis, 151.  
 Dalston, the Lambs at, 1820, 365, 430, 485, 505.  
 Danby, Mr., his murder at Enfield, 647.  
 Daniel, George, his *Love's Labour's not Lost*, 516.  
 — — first meeting with Lamb, 516.  
 — — his reminiscences of Lamb, 516, 517, 518.  
 — — on Lamb's Russell Street rooms, 390.  
 Dante, Barnes on, 320.  
 — Hazlitt on, 383.  
 — Cary's translation of, 437, 623, 648.  
 Darley, George, teaches Miss Kelly Latin, 417.  
 — — Lamb's esteem for, 441.  
 — — his *Sylvia*, 441.  
 — — at Enfield, Westwood on, 590.  
 — — — 596.  
 Darwin, Dr., Lloyd under, 116.  
 Dash, Lamb's dog, Patmore's account of, 569.  
 — Lamb's anxiety for, 570.  
 — Lamb on, 582, 583, 584.  
 — and the move to Enfield, 588.  
 David contrasted with Titian and Correggio, 261.  
 Dawe, George, and Lamb's "Recollections" of, 635.  
 — — and Lamb's memorial of, 255.  
 — — probably introduced to Lamb by Godwin, 263.  
 — — Lamb on, 263, 264.  
 — — Robinson on, 307.  
 — — preferred above Haydon, 317.  
 — — made an R.A., 1814, 343.  
 — — and his allegorical goose, Lamb on, 343.  
 Death, Lamb on, 485, 486, 587.  
 "Death-Bed, A," by Charles Lamb, 205, 571.  
 "Deaths of Little Children, The," by Leigh Hunt, 425.  
 Debts and Lamb, 651.
- Decameron, The*, by Boccaccio, Hazlitt on, 382, 383.  
 Decker, Thomas, Lamb on, 386.  
 Dedham, in Essex, George Dyer at, 145.  
 "Defeat of Time, The," and Hood's *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*, 579, 587.  
 Defoe, Daniel, Walter Wilson's biography of, 210.  
 — — and Godwin's tragedy, 215.  
 De Morgan, Mrs. Augustus, *née* Sophia Frennd, 165.  
 — — — — on Dyer's marriage and Mrs. Dyer, 165, 166.  
 — — — — her story of her father and Dyer as a Baptist minister, 166.  
 — — — — her account of Dyer's death, 167.  
 De Quincey, Richard ("Pink"), and the Lambs at a picture exhibition, 269.  
 — — — — his admiration for Benjamin West, 269.  
 — — — — Lamb's liking for, 270.  
 — — — — Thomas, his account of Williams, the Ratcliffe Highway murderer, 163.  
 — — — — on Hazlitt's love for Dorothy Wordsworth, 249.  
 — — — — his "London Reminiscences," 252.  
 — — — — his visit to Lamb at the India House, 252.  
 — — — — on Lamb's courtesy, 253, 254.  
 — — — — his visit to the Lambs, 1804, 254.  
 — — — — and Lamb on the "Ancient Mariner," 255.  
 — — — — Mary Lamb's goodness to, 255.  
 — — — — on his brother and the Lambs at a picture exhibition, 269.  
 — — — — on the Lambs' love of pictures, 269.  
 — — — — on the Lambs' "dual unity," 269.  
 — — — — on Lamb and Sir Walter Scott, 269.  
 — — — — his gift to Coleridge, 288.  
 — — — — at Lamb's, 1814, 342.  
 — — — — on Lamb's want of national enthusiasm, 342.  
 — — — — his marriage, Lamb on, 391.  
 — — — — on Lamb's sympathies and dis-sympathies, 456, 457, 458.  
 — — — — his "London Reminiscences," 466, 467, 468, 469.  
 — — — — his review of Talfourd's biography, 466.  
 — — — — on Lamb and stimulants, 466.  
 — — — — on Lamb sleeping, 466, 467.



- De Quincey, Thomas, and "Diddle, diddle, dumpkins," 467, 468, footnote.
- — — Lamb chaffing, 468, 469.
- — — his essay on "Macbeth," Lamb on, 469.
- — — Lamb on, and the *London Magazine*, 487.
- — — his story of Lamb's stammering when being dipped, 507, 508.
- — — his description of his sufferings and Lamb's pun on, 529.
- "Descriptive Sketches," by Wordsworth, 90.
- "Deserted Village, The," 39.
- Desultory Thoughts*, by Charles Lloyd, quoted, 135.
- "Devil's Walk, The," by Coleridge and Hood, 516.
- "Dialogue Between a Mother and Child," by Mary Lamb, 247.
- Dibdin, John Bates, letter from Lamb in verse to, 1826, quoted, 5, 6.
- — — the beginning of his friendship with Lamb, 1823, 504, 505.
- — — at Lamb's, 536.
- — — at Hastings, 565.
- — — his death, 1829, 611.
- Dickens, Charles, and his Micawber type, 203.
- — his *Hunted Down* and Wainwright, 440.
- — at Hone's funeral, 552.
- — and Cowden Clarke, 603.
- "Diddle, diddle, dumpty," etc., and Lamb, 467, 623.
- Dignum and Mrs. Bland, Lamb's joke on, 309.
- Dilke, Charles Wentworth, Lamb's request to, for books, 648.
- Disraeli, Benjamin, and Barron Field, 357.
- Isaac, and Miss Benger on, 181.
- Diss, in Norfolk, the home of Manning's father, 175.
- "Dissertation on Roast Pig," 18, 484, 497, 672.
- "Distant Correspondents," 372, 375, 445.
- Dix, John, his *Lions Living and Dead*, 667, 668.
- Dobell, Bertram, his *Sidelights on Charles Lamb*, 556.
- Dockwra, Tom, of Widford, 37.
- Dodd, James William, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78, 487.
- Dodwell, Henry, of the India House, Lamb's charade on, 545.
- Dogs, Lamb's, 569, 570.
- Domenichino and John Lamb, Lamb on, 472.
- Donne, John, and Lamb, 379, 382.
- Don Quixote and Lamb's evenings, 387.
- Dorrell, William, a witness to the will of John Lamb the elder, 170.
- Dove Cottage, Grasmere, the home of the Wordsworths, 196.
- Dover Street, Moxon's new premises, 648.
- Dowden, Mrs. Isaac, marries John Lamb, 482.
- — — her death, 549.
- "Down Hall," by Matthew Prior, Lamb's praise of, 344.
- Down Street, Piccadilly, Hazlitt lodging at, 521, 523.
- — — first meeting of the Lambs and Patmore, 523.
- Dramatic Scenes*, by B. W. Procter, Lamb on, 377.
- *Specimens*, Lamb working at, 262, 283.
- — and the proposed portrait of Lamb, 287.
- — and Gifford's attack on Lamb, 319.
- — and Procter's *Dramatic Scenes*, 377.
- — and Lamb's *Works*, 406.
- — and Lamb on Marlowe's Jew, 459.
- — and Murray's project, 624.
- — and Lamb's Garrick extracts, 624.
- — and Moxon's edition of, 1835, 624.
- "Dream Children," 28, 32, 38, 83, 418, 460, 470, 471, 483.
- Druitt, Mary, of Wimborne, Lamb's epitaph on, quoted, 223.
- Drummond of Hawthornden and Ben Jonson's visit to, 386.
- Drury Lane Theatre and Lamb's play of "John Woodvil," 174.
- — and "Mr. H.," 272, 276, 278.
- — the fire at, 293.
- — Coleridge's "Remorse" produced at, 326.
- — and Lamb's "Rejected Address," 326.
- — Mary Lamb at, 363.
- — refuses Coleridge's "Zapolya," 363.
- Dryden, John, and Hazlitt's essay writing, 445.
- Dual unity of Charles and Mary, Lamb on, 259.
- — De Quincey and Wordsworth on, 269.
- — of Charles and Mary, described by Robert Lloyd, 296.
- — of Charles and Mary, Allsop on, 576.
- Dublin University Magazine* and Mr. H. F. Cox on "Charles Lamb at Edmonton," 654.

- Dudley, Charles Stoke, husband of Hester Savory, 239.
- Dulwich College and Lamb, 517.
- Dundas, Lord, and Lamb's epigrams in *The Champion*, 426.
- Dyer, George, Lamb's letter to, about Grecians, 57.
- reviews *Falstaff's Letters*, 92.
- and poetry, 143, 149.
- and "Oxford in the Vacation," 144, 158, 159, 160.
- and "Amicus Redivivus," 144, 160.
- at Christ's Hospital, 144.
- and the suppressed passage, 145.
- his letter denying Lamb's story, 145, 146, 147.
- his *Poetics*, 1812, 145.
- on Elia, 147.
- and the Rev. Dr. Ryland, 146, 147.
- and the Rev. Robert Robinson, 147, 148.
- Lamb's letter to, on his characteristics, 147.
- his absent-mindedness, 148, 158, 159, 162, 163.
- becomes a Unitarian, 148.
- and John Clarke, 148.
- his romance, 149.
- Hazlitt on, 149.
- his home in Clifford's Inn, 149.
- and presentation copies, 149.
- his *Poems*, 149-57.
- his phrenesis, 150, 151.
- introduces Rickman to Lamb, 151.
- and Lamb's care of him, 152.
- his autobiography, 153, 154.
- as hero for a novel, 153.
- his first acquaintance with Lamb, 154.
- as "Cancellarius Major," 155.
- his stanzas on Christ's Hospital, 156.
- his weakness for footnotes, 157.
- in the earth bath, 157.
- his prose works, 158.
- his armchair library, 158.
- at Leigh Hunt's, 162.
- his breakfast to Procter, 163.
- his dog, 163.
- described by Leigh Hunt, 163.
- by Talfourd, 163.
- and Lamb's jokes, 163, 164.
- a legatee and executor of Lord Stanhope, 164.
- receives an annuity, 164.
- Lamb's love and admiration for, 164.
- as a gipsy, 164, 165.
- his marriage, 165.
- his wife described, 165.
- and Frennd's joke, 165.
- Dyer, George, his happy old age, 165.
- and William Frennd's death, 167.
- Mrs. De Morgan's account of his death, 167.
- his widow, 167.
- his *Poems*, Lamb's letters on, 184.
- his visit of condolence with Lamb to Joseph Cottle, 185.
- introduces Rickman to Lamb, 186.
- tutor to the sons of "Citizen" Stanhope, 207.
- and Lord Buchan, 224.
- and Dawe, 264.
- and Miss Betham's request to Lamb, 287.
- at Lamb's party, 355.
- at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 374.
- and the authorship of *Waverley*, 495.
- in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- his immersion, 519.
- his blindness, Lamb on, 632.
- and his Unitarian tract, Lamb on, 637.
- his rooms at Clifford's Inn, Lamb's last visit to, 1834, 674.
- Mrs., formerly Mrs. Mather, 165.
- her sense and kindness described by Mrs. De Morgan, 165, 166.
- her happy effect on Dyer described by Cowden Clarke, 166.
- her praise of Charles and Mary Lamb, 167.
- her good sense, Lamb on, 632.
- and Lamb's last letter to, 674.

## E

- Earl of Abergavenny*, East Indian, wreck of, 257.
- John Wordsworth, captain of, 257.
- East India House, 75.
- Lamb enters the Accountant's department, 76.
- Lamb's bondsmen there, 76.
- and William Evans, 91.
- De Quincey's visit to Lamb at, 252, 253, 254.
- and Lamb and the Wordsworths, 257.
- and the clerks at "Mr. H.," 276.
- Lamb's increase of salary, 1809, 299.
- pun on the Compounds, 310.
- its penalty for drunkenness, 338, 412.
- Lamb's story of a cannibal clerk at, 342.

- East India House, William Evans at, 350.  
 — — — Lamb's over-work at, 352, 353.  
 — — — and Lamb's increase of salary, 1815, 353, 354.  
 — — — the grand feast day at, 359.  
 — — — and the year 1816, 363.  
 — — — Thomas Love Peacock at, 377.  
 — — — Lamb's weariness of, 486, 530, 531, 535, 536.  
 — — — and Lamb's salary in 1825, 535.  
 — — — and Lamb's resignation, 539.  
 — — — and Lamb's release, 540.  
 — — — and Lamb's pension, 540.  
 — — — and the "Superannuated Man," 541.  
 — — — Lamb's *Works* at, 542, 545.  
 — — — and Lamb's work at, 542.  
 — — — stories of Lamb at, 543, 544.  
 — — — in the present day, 545.  
 — — — and Lamb's desire for release, 548.  
 — — — the stationery there and Lamb, 561.  
 — — — Lamb's quarterly visits to, 1830, 619.  
 — — — friends at, attend his funeral, 675.  
 — — — and the pension to Mary Lamb, 682.  
 "Edax on Appetite," by Charles Lamb, Lamb on, 336.  
 Edinburgh, Charles Lloyd at, 109.  
*Edinburgh Review* and *John Woodvil*, 226.  
 — — Crabb Robinson on, 319.  
 Edmonton, Lamb's grave at, 438, 653.  
 — Charles moves with Mary to, 652.  
 Edmonton, Charles Lamb at, Mr. H. F. Cox on, 653.  
 — Lamb's cottage at, 655.  
 — J. Fuller Russell's account of the Lambs at, 669, 670, 671.  
 — Thomas Westwood on the Lambs at, 672.  
 — Mary Lamb moved from, 1841, 685.  
 — Mary Lamb's funeral at, 688.  
 — Church, the memorial in, to Lamb and Cowper, 680.  
*Edmund Oliver*, by Charles Lloyd, Coleridge portrayed in, 130.  
 — — dedicated to Charles Lamb, 131.  
 — — criticised in *The Anti-Jacobin*, 137.  
 Edwards, Mr. F. G., and Cowden Clarke's copy of Procter's Lamb, 602, footnote.  
 Eels, John Lamb on cruelty to, 478, 479, 480.  
 Elford, Sir William, and Miss Mitford on Lamb and *Elia*, 532.
- Elia*, Preface by a Friend of the Late, quoted, 210, 451, etc.  
 — Philarète Chasles on the name, 408.  
 — Lamb on advantage of the pseudonym, 442, 443.  
 — anagram of "a lie," 442, footnote.  
 — Bernard Barton's sonnet to, 494.  
*Elia*, *The Essays of*, their two references to Lamb's mother, 123.  
 — — — first begun, 442.  
 — — — Barry Cornwall on, 442.  
 — — — the payment for, 442.  
 — — — their character, 443, 444, 445.  
 — — — contrasted with Lamb's epistolary style, 445, 446.  
 — — — Landor on, 446, 447, 645.  
 — — — Mr. Swinburne on, 447, 448.  
 — — — Walter Pater on, 448, 449, 450.  
 — — — Lamb in, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455.  
 — — — published in 1823, 496.  
 — — — Lamb's gift of, to Wordsworth, 497.  
 — — — Lamb on, 497.  
 — — — and Dibdin, 504.  
 — — — Southey's attack on, 508.  
 — — — and Patmore's *Rejected Articles*, 523.  
 — — — Munden embalmed in, 526.  
 — — — Miss Mitford's admiration of, 532.  
 — — — the American Second Series of, 603.  
 — — — Messrs. Hallward & Hill's school edition of, 651.  
 — — — and N. Parker Willis, 665.  
 — — *Last Essays of*, and the *Literary Gazette*, 627.  
 — — — published 1833, 647.  
 — — — and the lawsuit between Taylor and Moxon, 647.  
 — — — Lamb on his profits in, 648.  
 — — — Lamb's gifts of, to his friends, 648.  
 — — — and Landor, Lamb on, 659.  
*Elia*, essays quoted:—  
 "Amicus Redivivus," 144, 160.  
 "A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People," 304.  
 "Barbara S——," 78, 411, 412.  
 "Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art," 636.  
 "Blakesmoor in H—shire," 28, 29, 83, 84, 131.  
 "Captain Jackson," 203.



*Elia*, essays quoted:—

- "A Chapter on Ears," 344, 397, 398.  
 "Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago," 19, 48, 51, 52, 53, 54, 65, 66, 67.  
 "The Convalescent," 550.  
 "A Death Bed," 206, 571.  
 "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig," 18, 84, 672.  
 "Distant Correspondents," 357, 372, 446.  
 "Dream Children," 28, 32, 38, 83, 460, 470, 471, 483.  
 "Ellistoniana," 278, 420.  
 "Imperfect Sympathies," 306, 451, 455, 639.  
 "Mackery End in Hertfordshire," 8, 20, 23, 259, 355, 356, 460.  
 "Modern Gallantry," 72.  
 "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," 233.  
 "My First Play," 9, 43, 325, 460.  
 "My Relations," 460, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476.  
 "New Year's Eve," 38, 50, 62, 170, 451, 460.  
 "Newspapers Thirty-five Years Ago," 67, 199, 218, 219, 220.  
 "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," 4, 7, 70, 169, 460.  
 "Old China," 171, 172, 173, 390, 484, 648.  
 "On Some of the Old Actors," 78, 84.  
 "Oxford in the Vacation," 144, 145, 158, 159, 419.  
 "Poor Relations," 3, 11, 12, 67.  
 Popular Fallacies:—  
   That We should Rise with the Lark, 484, 546.  
   That We should Lie Down with the Lamb, 484.  
 "The Old and the New Schoolmaster," 463.  
 "The Praise of Chimney Sweepers," 86, 87, 484.  
 "Preface by a Friend of the Late *Elia*," 210, 451, 453, 454, 456.  
 "A Quakers' Meeting," 113.  
 "The South-Sea House," 74, 442.  
 "The Superannuated Man," 541.  
 "The Two Races of Men," 200.  
 "The Wedding," 461, 462, 463, 648.  
 "Witches and other Night Fears," 18, 460.  
 Ellenborough, Lord, and Hone's trial, 551.  
 Ellice, Mr., of the Treasury, and Coleridge's pension, 633, 634.  
 Elliston, R. W., a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.

- Elliston, R. W., in "Mr. H.," 276.  
 — — — and his acquaintance with Lamb, 278.  
 — — — Lamb on, 279.  
 — — — Lamb's first meeting with, 420.  
 — — — and Lamb and Munden, story of, 420.  
 — — — Lamb's essay on, and the *Englishman's Magazine*, 635.  
 "Ellistoniana," 278, 420.  
 Elmes, Mr. James, on Lamb and Haydon, 317, 318.  
 Elton, Charles Abraham ("Olen"), his "Idler's Epistle to John Clare," 441.  
 — — — his poem to Lamb, 452.  
 — — — Lamb on, 453.  
 — — — at Colebrooke, Crabb Robinson on, 529.  
 Emerson, R. W., his visit to Coleridge, 637.  
 Emmanuel College, Cambridge, George Dyer at, 144.  
 Enfield and pleasant walks to, 172.  
 — Lamb's walk to, with Robinson, 343.  
 — first visit to, with the Allsops, 550.  
 — Lamb on the dogs there, 570.  
 — the Lambs' second visit to Mrs. Leishman's, 578.  
 — the Lambs take a house in, 587.  
 — the Greyhound, the Cowden Clarkes at, 596, 617.  
 — Lamb on its dullness, 614, 620.  
 — the Crown and Horseshoe and Lamb, 617.  
 — Lamb's weariness of, 624.  
 — the Lambs leave, 652.  
*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 138.  
*Englishman's Magazine* (Moxon's), and Lamb's contributions to, 632, 635.  
 — — and "Peter's Net," 635.  
 — — its sudden end, 636.  
 Epigrams, Lamb's, on Canning and Frere, 138.  
 — — on Sir James Mackintosh, 200.  
 — — in *The Albion*, 214.  
 — — in *The Examiner and Champion*, 223.  
 — — in *The Champion*, 426, 427.  
 — — for the Hesseys, 437.  
*Essay on Human Action*, by Hazlitt, 249.  
 "Essay on the Chief Living Poets," by T. N. Talfourd, 351, 352.  
 Essayists, British, and Lamb and Hazlitt, 445.  
 Essex Street Chapel, attended by Aunt Hetty, 12, 90.  
 Eton, the boys at, John Lamb's joke on, 474.

- European Magazine* and J. B. Dibdin, 504.
- Evans, Mary, Coleridge's love for, 79.
- William (brother of Mary Evans), enters the India House, 91.
- — introduces Talfourd to Lamb, 350.
- — proprietor of *The Pamphleteer*, 350.
- — Lamb's portrait painted by Joseph for, 350.
- Evanson, his *Dissonance of the Gospel* and Pitchford's pun, 310, 369.
- Evelyn, John, his *Works*, Lamb on, 497, 568.
- "Evening Walk," by Wordsworth, 90.
- Evenings at Home*, by Mrs. Barbauld and Dr. John Aikin, 323.
- Every-Day Book*, Hone's, and Lamb, 550, 551, 552.
- — — its dedication to the Lambs, 552.
- Examiner, The*, Lamb's political epigrams in, 223.
- — and Lamb's "Triumph of the Whale," 320, 322, 329.
- — and Hunt's "Wishing Cap," papers in, 326, 514.
- — and Lamb's "Table Talk" in, 326.
- — Hunt's rhyming epistle to Lamb in, 327.
- — and Lamb's verses "To T. L. H.," 330.
- — and Vindicator's letter in, 339, 340.
- — and Hazlitt's review of *The Excursion*, 345.
- — and Hazlitt's attack on Coleridge, 366.
- — and Lamb's sonnet on Gifford, 367, 406.
- — and Lamb's *Works*, 406.
- — and Lamb's review of *Nuga Canora*, 411.
- — and Lamb's criticisms of Miss Kelly, 414, 417.
- — and Lamb's sonnet at Cambridge, 419.
- — and John Lamb's letters on the Corn Laws, 480, 481, 482.
- — and Lamb's sonnet on "Work," 493.
- — and the *Literary Gazette's* attack on Lamb's *Album Verses*, 626, 627.
- Examiner's Office, South-Sea House, Lamb's employment there, 73, 75.
- Excursion, The*, by Wordsworth, 337, 341.
- — Lamb's review of, 345, 346.
- — Hazlitt's review of, 345, 372.
- — Lamb on, 346.
- Excursion, The*, Mary Lamb on, 346.
- — and Coleridge, 372.
- Exeter Change and Lamb, 650.
- "Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg," by Wordsworth, 57, 669.
- "Extracts from the Portfolio of a Man of the World," and Lamb and Coleridge, 484, 485.
- Extract Book, Emma Isola's, Lamb's selection of poems in, 605, 606.

## F

- Faint, Mr. (Mrs. Norris' brother), 576.
- Fall of Robespierre, The*, by Coleridge and Southey, 137.
- Falstaff's Letters*, by James White, 76.
- — reviewed by George Dyer, 92.
- — its dedication, 180.
- — given by Lamb to Landor, 645.
- Family Pictures*, by Miss Anne Manning, 70, 71.
- "Farewell to Essay Writing," by Hazlitt, quoted, 298.
- "Farewell to Tobacco" written, 261.
- — Lamb and Hazlitt's *British Poets*, 521.
- — and Lamb's manner to his sister, 598.
- Farmer, Richard, Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, and George Dyer, 144.
- Farren, Miss, a favourite actress of Lamb's, 78.
- "Father's Wedding Day, The," Landor's praise of, 683, 684.
- Fauntleroy, Henry, his execution, Lamb on, 532, 533.
- Faust*, by Goethe, and Lamb, 312.
- Faustus, Dr., and Lamb's wish to see, 379.
- Favell, Samuel, evades a Grecian's destiny, 56.
- — described in "Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago," 66.
- — his enthusiasm and poetry on Pantisocracy, 67.
- Fawkes, Guy, and Lamb's wish to see, 387.
- — his plot, Lamb on, 639.
- Feathers, The, Hand Court, Holborn, patronised by Lamb, White and Gutch, 85.
- Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, and Lamb on Miss Kelly, 413.
- Fell, R., introduced to Lamb by Godwin, 202.
- — his practical joke with Lamb on Godwin, 202.
- — editor of a "Naval Chronicle," 230.

- Fell, R., his misfortunes, Lamb on, 265.  
 — — his drunkenness, 339.  
 Feltham, among Lamb's favourite authors, 568.  
 Fennings, Philip, of the Custom House, and John Lamb's will, 483.  
 Fenwick, John, editor of *The Albion*, 199, 202.  
 — — described by Lamb in "Newspapers Thirty-five Years Ago," 199.  
 — — described as Bigod in "The Two Races of Men," 200.  
 — — introduced to Lamb by Godwin, 201.  
 — — his death, 202.  
 — — his resemblance to Micawber and Falstaff, 203.  
 — — a ruined man, 230.  
 — — his misfortunes described by Mary Lamb, 242.  
 — — — — Lamb on, 265.  
 — — his drunkenness, 339.  
 — Mrs., a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, 201.  
 — — Mary Lamb's affection for, 242.  
 — — in distress, 306.  
 — — at Robinson's, 314.  
 Field, Barron, his visit to Mackery End, 23.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, in Australia, 1817, 202, 445.  
 — — at the Colliers', 310.  
 — — at 4 Hare Court Temple, 318.  
 — — and Leigh Hunt's article on the Regent, 322.  
 — — and Hunt's imprisonment, 326.  
 — — and Lamb's love of music, 345.  
 — — at Lamb's, 1815, 354.  
 — — at Mackery End, 355, 356.  
 — — his career, 357.  
 — — on Lamb's biographer, 357.  
 — — his memoir of Coleridge, 357.  
 — — his memoir of Lamb, 357, 358.  
 — — his death, 1841, 358.  
 — — at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 375.  
 — — leaves England, 1817, 375.  
 — — his wish to see Garrick, 386.  
 — — his farce "The Antiquary," and Lamb's library, 479.  
 — — Lamb borrows his seal, 494.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, October 4th, 1827, 592.  
 — — at Crabb Robinson's with Lamb, 1834, 660.  
 — — at Talfourd's supper-party with Lamb, 1834, 660.  
 — — at Talfourd's last dinner to Lamb, 1834, 674.  
 — — Mrs., Lamb's verses to, 358.  
 Field, Francis John, Barron Field's brother, 357.  
 — — Henry, apothecary to Christ's Hospital, and father of Barron Field, 357.  
 — — and Lamb at amateur theatricals, 358.  
 — — Mr., Lamb's maternal grandfather, his history unknown, 23.  
 — — Mary, Lamb's grandmother, house-keeper at Blakesware, 6, 23.  
 — — and Mrs. Gladman, 20.  
 — — her ancestry and service, 23.  
 — — in charge at Blakesware, 25.  
 — — and Mary, 27, 99.  
 — — and Charles, 28.  
 — — in "Saturday Night," 28.  
 — — in "Dream Children," 32, 33, 34.  
 — — her character and death, 33, 76, 80.  
 — — Lamb's poem on, 35.  
 — — her grave, 36.  
 — — and Lamb's attachment to Alice W——, 81.  
 — — and *Rosamund Gray*, 139.  
 — — Miss Mary Louisa, her recollections of Lamb, 358.  
 — — Rev. Matthew, described by Lamb, 51, 52.  
 — — — described by Leigh Hunt, 52, 53.  
 Fielde, Francis, Lamb's godfather, 9.  
 — — and Sheridan, 9, 10.  
 — — presents orders for Lamb's first play, 43.  
 — — his bequest to Lamb, 325.  
 Fielding, Henry, discussed at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 378, 379, 385.  
 — — his Parson Adams and Cary, 437.  
 Fife, The Duke of, and Mary Lamb's snuffbox, 687.  
 "First Visit to Church, The," 292.  
 Fish, potted, and Lamb, 665.  
 FitzGerald, Edward, and Thackeray and "Saint Charles," 533.  
 — — his "Meadows in Spring," and Lamb, 635.  
 — — Mrs. Edward (*née* Lucy Barton), her reminiscences of the Lambs, 687.  
 — — her visit to Mary Lamb after Charles's death, 687.  
 — — and Lamb's bookcase, 687, 688.  
 — — her blue muslin, and Mary Lamb, 688.  
 Flaxman, John, on Lamb's essay on Hogarth, 313.  
 — — and the prologue to *Mr. H.*, 315.  
 — — and Lamb's "New Year's Eve," 460.



- Fleet Prison, The, and Fenwick, 265.  
 — Street, better to live in than Skiddaw, 227.
- Fletcher of Saltoun, and his biography by the Earl of Buchan, 224.
- Flower, Benjamin, father of Sarah Flower, 555.  
 — Sarah (afterwards Sarah Adams), her description of an evening with the Lambs and Coleridge, 555-60.
- Flowers, Lamb's favourite, George Daniel on, 517.
- Foliage*, by Leigh Hunt, and the rhyming epistle to Lamb, 327.
- Footnotes, Dyer's weakness for, 157.
- Ford, John, his "Broken Heart," Lamb's criticism of, 319.
- Fornham, in Suffolk, Miss Isola at, 595.  
 — Lamb and Miss Isola's journey from, 620, 621.
- Forster, John, and Lamb's biography, 357.  
 — — editor of the *Reflector*, 647.  
 — — at Talfourd's supper-party to Macready and Lamb, 1834, 660.  
 — — at Talfourd's last dinner-party to Lamb, 674.  
 — — at Mary Lamb's funeral, 688.
- Forty Hill, Enfield, and Lamb, 585.
- Foster, Mr. G. Carey, and recollections of the Lambs in Little Queen Street, 75.  
 — Mr. William, on Lamb's duties at the India House, 542.
- France, Lamb in, 335.
- Frankenstein*, by Mrs. Shelley, Lamb's admiration of, 396.
- Franklin, schoolfellow of Lamb, his rooms at Cambridge, 361.
- French not understood by Charles or Mary, 181.  
 — Lamb on his deficiency in, 662.
- Friend, Rev. William, executor of George Dyer, 151.  
 — — — consulted by Dyer on his marriage, 165.  
 — — — his story of Dyer as a Baptist minister, 166.  
 — — — his death and Dyer's, 167.
- Frere, J. Hookham, and Lamb's epigram on, in 1802, 138.  
 — — — his annuity to Coleridge, 635.
- Fricker, Edith (afterwards Mrs. Southey), engaged to Southey, 84.  
 — Sarah (afterwards Mrs. Coleridge), and Southey's mission to Coleridge, 84.  
 — — married to Coleridge, 88.
- Friend, The*, Coleridge planning, 288.  
 — — the prospectus of, 293.  
 — — its first appearance, 294.  
 — — its end, 302.
- Friends, Lamb on his, 109, 110, 210, 402.
- Friendship and Lamb, 249, 250.
- Frith Street, Soho, No. 6, Hazlitt dies at, 631.  
 — — — No. 44, Coleridge staying at, 323.
- Frogs, Lamb on, 583.
- Fryer, Miss (schoolfellow of Emma Isola), her letter to Lamb on Emma's wedding, 656.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, February 10th, 1834, 660.
- Fulham, Mary Lamb nursed at, 1829, 612.
- Fuseli, Lamb's praise of, Hunt on, 318.

## G

- "Gaffer Gray," by Thomas Holcroft, 230.
- Galighani, A. & W., Paris, their edition of Lamb's poems, 618.
- Ganges, The, and *Elia*, 672.
- Garden of Eden, Lamb on, 650.
- Gardening and Lamb, 514, 517.
- Garrick, David, John Lamb the elder on, 169.  
 — — discussed at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 386.  
 — — his collection of plays, Lamb's extracts from, 552, 567, 624.
- Gay, John, discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.  
 — — his verses on Pope, 385.  
 — — his "Trivia" and Lamb and Exeter Change, 650.
- Gebir*, by Landor, and Lamb, 659.
- Gem, The*, Lamb's contribution to ("Saturday Night"), 27.  
 — — its rejection of Lamb's "Gipsy's Malison," 607.  
 — — and "The Widow," 607.
- Generosity, Lamb's, 39.
- Genoa, Leigh Hunt at, 532.
- "Gentle Giantess, The," by Lamb, 428.
- Gentleman, qualities of a, Lamb on, 530.
- Gentleman's Magazine*, Le Grice's article on Lamb, 65.  
 — — 1813, and Dyer's "Stanzas on Christ's Hospital," quoted by Lamb in, 156.  
 — — and Daniel Stuart's reminiscences, 215.  
 — — and Lamb's memoir of Robert Lloyd, 313.  
 — — Lamb's "Recollections of Christ's Hospital" in, 326.  
 — — 1846, and "A Man of the World" on Lamb and Coleridge, 484, 485.  
 — — Mitford the editor of, 567.

- Gentleman's Magazine*, an account of the Lambs at Colebrooke, 567.
- Gentleness, Lamb on, 117.
- Mr. William Archer on, 118.
- Geographers, Lamb on, 302.
- George III. at Kew, Mary Lamb on, 369.
- George IV., his pensions of the Royal Associates, and Coleridge, 634.
- — See Regent.
- Gifford, William, his attack on Lamb, 319.
- — editor of the *Quarterly Review*, 345.
- — and Lamb's review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, 345.
- — Lamb's malediction on, 367.
- — Lamb's sonnet on, 367, 405, 406.
- — and Clare's poems, 440.
- Gil Blas*, Lamb on, 362, 378.
- — and Landor on Elia, 645.
- Gilchrist, Octavius, his review of Clare's poems, 440.
- Gillman, James, Coleridge recommended to, by Dr. Adams, 310, 314.
- — Coleridge under his care, 363, 364.
- — invites Lamb and Charles Mathews, 464.
- — entertains Coleridge's wife and daughter, 500, 501.
- — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- — attends Lamb, 1825, 550.
- — Lamb's letter to, October, 1829, 613.
- — his insolent letter to *The Times*, about Coleridge's pension, 634.
- — Lamb's feelings towards, 1834, 666.
- — and Lamb on Coleridge, 667.
- Gillray, James, his caricature in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, 136, 178.
- Gilpin, Mrs. John, Lamb on, in the *Table Book*, 579.
- Gilston and the Plumers, 24, 35.
- the final dispersal of the Blakesware treasures, 83.
- Giordano and John Lamb, Lamb on, 474.
- Gladman, Mrs., Lamb's great-aunt, 20.
- Gladmans, The, Lamb on, 356.
- Glanvill, Joseph, on witchcraft, 15, 17.
- Globe, The*, and Mr. H. F. Cox on Charles Lamb at Edmonton, 653.
- Godard House, Widford, the Norrises at, 572.
- Godfathers, Lamb's, 9.
- Godfrey of Boulogne and Lamb, 584.
- Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, her death, 201.
- William, first acquaintance with Lamb, 67.
- Godwin, William, introduced to Lamb by Coleridge, 178.
- — the first meeting described by Southey, 179.
- — his horrible nose, 179.
- — his "Toad or Frog" question, 179.
- — his tragedy of "Antonio," 179, 193.
- — and *Tales from Shakespear* and *Mrs. Leicester's School*, 179.
- — Coleridge's letter to, May 21st, 1800, 183.
- — and explanations, 187.
- — Lamb on his visit after "Antonio," 194.
- — introduces Fenwick to Lamb, 201.
- — and Lamb and Fell's practical joke, 202.
- — his freedom of speech, Lamb on, 208.
- — his "Faulkener," 211, 214, 215, 283.
- — his courting, Lamb on, 211.
- — his marriage to Mrs. Clairmont, 212.
- — his finances, 212.
- — not "Tom Pry," 213.
- — asks Lamb's help, 215.
- — Lamb on his friendship, 230.
- — his *Life of Chaucer*, 244.
- — Coleridge's disparagement of, 246.
- — Lamb and Hazlitt's first meeting at his house, 248.
- — and George Dawe, 263.
- — Lamb's prologue to his "Faulkener," 283.
- — Robert Lloyd on, 295.
- — a social evening at his house, 303.
- — Lamb and Crabb Robinson at his house, 306.
- — Charles and Mary at his house, 310.
- — Crabb Robinson's visit to, 314.
- — on Shakespeare and Coleridge, 314, 315.
- — and Lamb's work for, 337.
- — the Lambs at his house, 341.
- — his *Political Justice*, 373.
- — and Lamb's evenings, 373, 386, 387.
- — his talk, Hazlitt on, 380.
- — at the Lambs, and Crabb Robinson, 430.
- — tabooed, 457.
- — in distress, 1822, Crabb Robinson on, 494.
- — Lamb's efforts for, and assistance, 494, 495.
- — the fund for, 495.
- — his *History of the Commonwealth*, 495.

- Godwin, William, his post of Yeoman Usher, 495.  
 — — at Colebrooke, Crabb Robinson on, 528.  
 — — Lamb teases, 602.  
 — — his slight coolness with Lamb, 655.  
 — — reconciled, and dining with Lamb at Edmonton, 1833, 655.  
 — — his *Lives of the Necromancers*, 655.  
 — — the younger, Crabb Robinson's dislike of, 528.  
 — — and the *Morning Chronicle*, 528.  
 — — and Lamb's "Many Friends," 528, 536.  
 — — — the Lambs' fear of, 536.  
 Godwin, Mrs., previously Mrs. Clairmont, 212.  
 — — marries Godwin, 212.  
 — — Lamb's dislike of, 212.  
 — — and *Mrs. Leicester's School*, 212, 292.  
 — — described by Lamb in the *Lepus* papers, 212, 213.  
 — — alienates Godwin's friends, 230.  
 — — visits Mrs. Charlotte Smith, 271.  
 — — and the *Tales from Shakespear*, 252.  
 — — her bookshop at 41 Skinner Street, 292.  
 — — and Lamb's *Adventures of Ulysses*, 286, 292.  
 — — Robert Lloyd on, 295.  
 — — publishes *Poetry for Children*, 296.  
 — — publishes Lamb's *Prince Dorus*, 310.  
 — — her grievances, 315.  
 Godwins, The, juvenile publishing business, their, 256.  
 — — and Lamb's *King and Queen of Hearts*, 256.  
 Goethe, Taylor's translations of, 307.  
 — — and Lamb, 309, 310, 312.  
 — — his "Iphigenia" and Mary Lamb, 505.  
 — — his *Faust*, translated by Hayward, and Lamb, 650.  
 Goldsmith, Oliver, burial place of, 1.  
 — — and Mrs. Reynolds, 39, 383, 385.  
 — — his Dr. Primrose, and Cary, 437.  
 — — and Hazlitt's essay writing, 445.  
 Gosselin, the family, owners of Blakesware, 36.  
 "Grace before Meat," Dorothy Wordsworth on, 465.  
 Graham, Dr., his earth-bath treatment and George Dyer, 157.  
 Grasmere, Coleridge living at, 180, 293.  
 — — Dove Cottage, the home of the Wordsworths, 198.  
 Grasmere, Charles and Mary at, 228.  
 — — De Quincey living at, 468.  
 Graveyard, Lamb's question in, 38.  
 Gray, Thomas, his poetry, Lamb's abuse of, 343.  
 — — his "Elegy," Lamb helping a schoolboy to translate, 586.  
 Great Russell Street, No. 20, the Lambs living at, 390.  
 — — — — Barry Cornwall and George Daniel on, 390.  
 Grecians at Christ's Hospital, Lamb on, 57.  
 — — Leigh Hunt on, 57, 58.  
 Greg, Mr. Thomas, the owner of Button Snap, 325.  
 Grégoire on Deism, and Southey's attack on *Elia*, 506.  
 Gregory, Dr., discussed by Miss Benger, 182.  
 Greta Hall, Keswick, and the Southey's visit to Coleridge, 245.  
 — — Montagu at, 323.  
 Greville, Fulke, Lord Brooke, Lamb's wish to see, 381, 382, 386.  
 — — his "Mustapha" and his "Alaham," 386.  
 — — Cowley on, 386.  
 Grey, Lord, and Coleridge's pension, 633, 634, 635.  
 Grimwood, Dr., of Dedham, and George Dyer, 145, 146.  
 Groscollius and the motto in Coleridge's poems, 121, 129, 130.  
 Guichy and the Lambs' visit to France, 487.  
 "Guilt and Sorrow," by Wordsworth, 91.  
 Gunning, Henry, *Reminiscences of Cambridge*, 63, 429.  
 Gutch, John Mathew, schoolfellow of Lamb, on James White, 85.  
 — — — his offer of lodgings, 183.  
 — — — Lamb's visit to his family at Oxford, 184.  
 — — — proprietor of *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 413.  
 — — — his privately printed *Wither*, and Lamb, 544.  
 "Guy," Mr., and Lamb, 77, 78.  
 — — — — and the city clergyman, 77.

## H

- Hackney, Mary Lamb at, 116.  
 — — and the Lambs' walks, 365.  
 Hagan, Dr., teaches Manning Chinese, 227.  
 Hair, Lamb's, 568, 601, 663.  
 Hallward & Hill, Messrs., their school edition of *Elia*, 651.  
 "Hamlet," Lamb on the King in, 314.



- Hampstead Heath and Lamb's snuffbox, 552.
- Hampton Court, the cartoons at, discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.
- Handel, his "From Mighty Kings," Lamb's love for, 345.
- and Lamb's evenings, 386.
- Hanway Street and the Godwins, 256, 292.
- "Happy Warrior, The," by Wordsworth, his brother's character in, 257.
- Hare, supplants roast pig, 658, 673.
- Lamb on, in "Thoughts on Presents of Game," 658.
- Hare Court, Lamb on the pump there, 294.
- Hare, Julius, and Lamb, 469.
- "Harlequin's Invasion" (Lamb's first pantomime), 43.
- Harness, W., and the Lambs, 643.
- Harrow, Charles and Mary at, 260.
- Hart, Hannah, married to Robert Lloyd, 247.
- "Hart-leap Well," by Wordsworth, Lamb's praise of, 306.
- Hastings, the Lambs at, 505, 506, 507.
- Dibdin at, 565.
- Lamb's jokes on, 530.
- Hatton Garden, Irving's chapel at, 529.
- Haydon, B. R., his "Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem" and the portrait of Wordsworth, 119.
- — — on Hazlitt's christening party, 316, 317.
- — — and Lamb in company, Mr. James Elmer on, 317, 318.
- — — his "Christ's Entry into Jerusalem," Lamb's verses on, 318.
- — — and Lamb's manner to Wordsworth, 376, 377.
- — — his talk, Hazlitt on, 380.
- — — his account of his party, 393, 394, 395.
- — — at Lamb's, 532.
- Haymarket Theatre and Ayrton, 371.
- Hayward, A., his translation of Goethe's *Faust* and Lamb, 650.
- Hazlitt, Mrs. John, Mary Lamb on, 248.
- — — her little girl's fondness for Charles Lamb, 303.
- Peggy, sister of William Hazlitt, and Mary Lamb, 248.
- William, at Nether Stowey, 1798, 118.
- — his description of Coleridge in 1798, 118.
- — and of Wordsworth, 118, 119.
- — on Dyer in "On the Look of a Gentleman," 149.
- — on Dyer's patient labour, 158.
- — on William Ayrton, 236.
- Hazlitt, William, on Mary Lamb, 244.
- — paints Lamb's portrait, 1804, 248.
- — paints Coleridge's portrait, 248.
- — introduced to Lamb by Coleridge, 248.
- — paints Wordsworth's portrait, 249.
- — De Quincey on, 249.
- — leaves painting for literature, 249.
- — his *Essay on Human Action*, 249.
- — his Tucker's *Light of Nature Revealed*, 249, 262.
- — and Lamb contrasted, 249, 250.
- — W. C. Hazlitt on, 249.
- — Lamb's friendship for, P. G. Patmore on, 250.
- — Lamb on his friendship with, 1816, 252.
- — and Miss Stoddart, 265.
- — on Mrs. Basil Montagu, 272.
- — his aversion to young girls, 273.
- — and Lamb scolded by Mary Lamb, 274.
- — on "Mr. H.," 277.
- — and Lamb and Crabb Robinson, 279.
- — engaged to Sarah Stoddart, 283.
- — his disagreement with Stoddart, 284.
- — his "death," 284.
- — on Lamb, 285.
- — Leigh Hunt's story of, and Lamb, 285.
- — his wedding, 1808, 289, 358.
- — as a Wednesday-man and a common-day man, Mary Lamb on, 293.
- — living at Winterslow, 295.
- — the Lambs' visit to, 1809, 298, 299.
- — on the Lambs' visit, 298, 299.
- — the Lambs' second visit to, 1810, 300.
- — on Lamb at Oxford, 300.
- — and Burnett's death, 307, 308.
- — on the Lambs and Coleridge, 308.
- — his borrowings from Lamb, 308.
- — on Lamb's puns, 309.
- — his son born, 1811, 312.
- — his first lecture, 1812, 316, 319.
- — at 19 York Street, Westminster, 316.
- — his parental affection, 316.
- — his christening party described by Haydon, 316, 317.
- — described by Talfourd, 318.
- — his lectures praised by Robinson, 318.
- — at Basil Montagu's, 319.
- — his work and Hunt's, 329.
- — Robinson on, 330.
- — reporter to the *Chronicle*, 330, 331.

- Hazlitt, William, at Rickman's, 341.  
 — — his review of the *Excursion*, 345.  
 — — a little quarrel with Lamb, 345.  
 — — on Lamb's review of the *Excursion*, 354.  
 — — and Mrs. Hazlitt at Lamb's party, 355.  
 — — his article on Coleridge, 1816, 365, 366.  
 — — knocked down by John Lamb, 367.  
 — — cut by Robinson, 370.  
 — — and the Lambs' continued friendship, 370.  
 — — Lamb's apology for, 372.  
 — — at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 374, 376, 378, 382, 383, 386.  
 — — Lamb's manner to, 376.  
 — — on Lamb's conversation, 378, 380.  
 — — on Lamb's Thursday evenings, 378-88.  
 — — his "On the Conversation of Authors," 378, 379, 380.  
 — — his "Persons One would Wish to have Seen," 380-88.  
 — — on his own talk, 380.  
 — — his quarrels with Lamb, 388.  
 — — his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* dedicated to Lamb, 1817, 388.  
 — — his lectures on poetry, 1818, 401.  
 — — and Crabb Robinson, 424, 426.  
 — — and Sheridan Knowles, 427.  
 — — his "Conversation of Authors," 430.  
 — — and Lamb and the *London Magazine*, 434.  
 — — and the *London Magazine*, 434, 441.  
 — — his essays and Lamb's contrasted, 445.  
 — — on Lamb's "Letter to Southey," 456, 521.  
 — — tabooed, 457.  
 — — and Napoleon, 458.  
 — — Lamb on his bad actions, 458.  
 — — on Lamb's tolerance, 458.  
 — — Lamb's championship of, 459, 468, 510, 511.  
 — — and Raphael, 461.  
 — — and Crabb Robinson, 461.  
 — — his practical philosophy and John Lamb, 476.  
 — — and the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510, 511.  
 — — Crabb Robinson on, 511.  
 — — at Lamb's evenings, 515.  
 — — his second marriage, 1824, 521.  
 — — his renewed friendship with Lamb, 521.  
 — — his *Select British Poets* and Lamb, 521.
- Hazlitt, William, and Patmore and the Lambs, 523.  
 — — his *Spirit of the Age*, and *Elia*, and Lamb on, 536, 537.  
 — — his "Lay of the Laureate" and Lamb, 537.  
 — — J. B.'s "Recollections" of, 538, 539.  
 — — and Sheridan Knowles, 549, 605.  
 — — in France, 565.  
 — — at Enfield, Westwood on, 589.  
 — — and Becky, 609.  
 — — and his bookseller's failure, Lamb on, 618.  
 — — and the attack on Lamb, 628.  
 — — his death, 1830, and Lamb, 630, 631.  
 — — his last years, 630, 631.  
 — — and the second Mrs. Hazlitt, 631.  
 — — his *Life of Napoleon*, 631.  
 — — his *Conversations with Northcote*, 631.  
 — — his last words, 631.  
 — — his funeral, Lamb at, 631.  
 — — a *Life* of, and Lamb's promised verses, 635.  
 — — Carlyle on anecdotes of, 638.  
 — — Lamb's praise of his writing, 1834, 665.  
 — — Mrs. William, Mary Lamb's letter to, December 10th, 1808, 293.  
 — — — Mary Lamb's letter to, November 7th, 1809, 299.  
 — — — Mary Lamb's letter to, October 2nd, 1811, 312.  
 — — — at Lamb's, 1819, 410.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, November, 1823, 519.  
 — — — Lamb on the three Mrs. Hazlitts, 583.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, May 24th, 1830, 629.  
 — — — (See also under Stoddart, Sarah.)  
 — — William, the younger, taught Latin by Mary Lamb, 50, 417.  
 — — Lamb on his birth, 1811, 312.  
 — — verses on the birth of (by Mary Lamb?), 312, 313.  
 — — his christening party, 316-318.  
 — — at his father's funeral, 631.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, September 13th, 1831, on a life of his father, 635.  
 — — W. Carew, his story of Mary Lamb, Mrs. Hazlitt and Dyer's arm-chair, 158.  
 — — — on William Hazlitt, 249.  
 — — — his *Lamb and Hazlitt* quoted, 284, 285, 312, 313.  
 — — — his *The Lambs*, and Chambers and Lamb, 543.

- Hazlitt, W. Carew, and Charles Tween  
on Lamb's small figure, 575.  
— — — on Mary Lamb's customs in  
her old age, 687.  
"Helen," by Mary Lamb, 184, 225.  
Helpstone, Northamptonshire, and John  
Clare, 440.  
Henshaw, one of Lamb's godfathers, 9.  
Hertfordshire and Lamb, 6, 20, 82, 325,  
356.  
Hessey, James Augustus, partner of  
Taylor, 437.  
— — — his son Archdeacon Hessey,  
and Lamb's epigrams for,  
437, 507.  
— — — Keats's nickname for, 437.  
— Archdeacon, and Lamb's verses for,  
437, 507.  
— — at Colebrooke, 529.  
"Hester," by Lamb, 238, 406.  
Hetty, Aunt. See Sarah Lamb.  
— the Lambs' servant, her death in 1800,  
182.  
Heywood, Thomas, edited by Barron  
Field, 357.  
— — Lamb on, 386.  
Higginbottom Sonnets, by Coleridge,  
124, 131.  
— — their effect on Southey, 124.  
— — — on Lloyd, 125.  
Highgate, The Grove, Coleridge living  
with Gillman at, 364.  
— Lamb at, to meet Mathews, 464.  
— Lamb at, after Coleridge's death, 666.  
Hill, Tommy, the drysalter, probably  
the original of Tom Fry, 213.  
Hippocrene and Hippocras, Lamb on,  
503.  
*History of the Abipones*, by Martin Dobriz-  
hoffer, Sara Coleridge's translation  
of, 500, 501.  
*History of Baptism*, by the Rev. Robert  
Robinson, edited by Dyer, 148.  
*History of Christ's Hospital*, by Trollope,  
47, 54.  
*History of the Commonwealth*, by God-  
win, 495.  
Hobbima and John Lamb, Lamb on,  
474.  
Hoddesdon and Lamb's walks, 486.  
Hodgkins, Thomas, Mrs. Godwin's man-  
ager at her juvenile business, 256.  
Hogarth, William, 1.  
— — "The Genius and Character of,"  
304.  
— — Lamb's essay on, Robinson and  
Flaxman on, 313.  
— — Lamb's prints of, 373, 391.  
— — his prints discussed at Lamb's  
evenings, 378.  
— — and Lamb's evenings, 386.  
Hogsflesh and "Mr. H.," 278.  
Holborn, Lamb on its greenness, 243.  
Holcroft, Fanny, daughter of Thomas  
Holcroft, Lamb's friendliness to,  
231.  
— — her work and her death, 522.  
— — Louisa (afterwards Mrs. Badams),  
Lamb's friendliness to, 231.  
— — Mrs. Shelley on, 489.  
— — and the sheepstealer's baby, Lamb  
on, 606, 607.  
— — her marriage, 606, 607.  
— Thomas, the dramatist, and Lamb,  
230.  
— — his life, by Hazlitt, 230.  
— — imprisoned for high treason, 1794,  
230.  
— — his "Road to Ruin," 230.  
— — his ballad "Gaffer Gray," 230.  
— — his dulness in company, 231.  
— — and his debate with Coleridge and  
Lamb, 248.  
— — his "The Vindictive Man," 276.  
— — his postscript to Lamb's letter,  
276.  
— — his death, 1809, 294.  
— — his Diary and Crabb Robinson,  
305.  
— — Mrs., marries James Kenney, 231,  
322.  
— — — at Crabb Robinson's, 1811, 307.  
— — — Mrs. Godwin's complaint of,  
315.  
— — — and Lamb's jokes on her  
marriage to Kenney, 322.  
— Tom, assisted by Lamb and the  
Robinsons, 420, 421, 425.  
— Villiers, and his brother Tom, 20, 25.  
Hollington Rural Church described by  
Lamb, 506, 507.  
Hollingshead, John, and Lamb's proposal  
to Miss Kelly, 414.  
— — (great-nephew of Miss James),  
488.  
— — on Lamb in Paris, 488.  
— — his recollection of Lamb, 685.  
— — on his great-aunts, Miss James  
and Mrs. Parsons, 685, 686.  
— — and Mary Lamb at Alpha Road,  
686.  
Holmes, Edward, and Cowden Clarke,  
603.  
*Home Counties Magazine* quoted, 24.  
Homer, Pope's translation of, 385.  
Hone, William, and Lamb's writings,  
357.  
— — his *Year Book* and Clare's sonnet  
to Lamb, 441, footnote.  
— — a satirist of the Regent, 516.  
— — his *Every-Day Book* and Lamb,  
550, 552.



- Hone, William, his chequered career, 550, 551, 552.  
 — — and Cruikshank, 550, 551.  
 — — his *Ancient Mysteries* and Lamb, 551.  
 — — his *Table Book* and *Year Book*, 551.  
 — — Lamb's verses on, 551.  
 — — his verses in reply, 551.  
 — — Lamb's efforts for, 552.  
 — — in the King's Bench, 1826, 552.  
 — — and Lamb's Garrick extracts, 552.  
 — — his death and funeral, 1842, 552.  
 — — his story of Lamb on giving up snuff, 552, 553.  
 — — his *Table Book* and Hood's caricature of Mary Lamb, 578, 579.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, July, 1827, 578.  
 — — the public subscription for, 1830, and Lamb's aid, 624.
- Hood, Thomas, on Mrs. Reynolds, 39.  
 — — on the Quaker-like appearance of Lamb's attire, 114.  
 — — sub-editor of the *London Magazine*, 437.  
 — — on Lamb's character, 456.  
 — — his *Hood's Own* and his reminiscences of Lamb, 491, 492.  
 — — on Lamb at Colebrooke, 516.  
 — — at Hastings, 1824, 530.  
 — — his *Odes and Addresses* reviewed by Lamb, 550.  
 — — his etchings and Coleridge, 559.  
 — — gives Dash to the Lambs, 569.  
 — — his child's death, Lamb's letter and poem on, 1827, 576.  
 — — and the Lambs at Enfield, 578.  
 — — his caricature of Mary Lamb, and Hope's *Table-Book*, 578.  
 — — his *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* dedicated to Lamb, 579.  
 — — on Lamb at Enfield, 579, 580.  
 — — on Lamb's jokes, 580.  
 — — and Lamb's walking measures, 580.  
 — — an evening with, by Mrs. Balmanno, 580, 581, 582.  
 — — at Enfield, Westwood on, 589.  
 — — on Lamb's way with his sister, 599.  
 — — his parody of Lamb, and *The Gem*, 607, footnote.  
 — — and Mary Lamb at Alpha Road, 686, 687, 688.  
 — — his death, 1845, 688.
- Mrs., the loss of her baby, and Lamb's poem on, 576, 577.  
 — — and Lamb, described by Mrs. Balmanno, 581, 582.  
 — — and Chase Side, Enfield, Lamb on, 587.
- Hook, Theodore, and Lamb, 518.  
 Hooker, John Lamb quoting, 481.  
 Hospitality and the Lambs, De Quincey on, 466.  
 — Lamb's, Moxon on, 651.  
 Hottentots, Lamb on their letters, 621.  
 Hoxton Asylum, 81.  
 — — Charles taking Mary there, described by Barry Cornwall, 173.  
 — — described by Charles Lloyd, 173, 174.  
 — — sonnet by Valentine le Grice on, 174, footnote.  
 — — Mary Lamb at, 239, 283.
- Hughes, Thomas, his *Memoir of Daniel Macmillan*, and Lamb and Julius Hare, 469.
- Hulse, of Blackheath, the sale of his pictures, 268.
- Hume, Joseph, and the Hazlitt suicide joke, 284, 285.  
 — — at Hazlitt's, 309.  
 — — Lamb's joke on, 369.  
 — — the statesman, and the East India Company, 486, footnote.
- Humour and Satire, Lamb on, 309.
- Humphreys, Mr. Deputy, and Bob Allen, 68.  
 — Miss, Emma Isola's aunt, Lamb's letter to, January 27th, 1821, 429.
- Hunt, John, brother of Leigh Hunt, his share in *The Reflector*, 303.  
 — — his prosecution with Leigh Hunt, 322.  
 — — his imprisonment, 326.  
 — Leigh, enters Christ's Hospital, 50.  
 — — his *Autobiography*, 50-67.  
 — — on Matthew Field, 52, 53.  
 — — on Grecians, 57, 58.  
 — — on Boyer, 59, 60.  
 — — on Samuel Le Grice, 66.  
 — — on Joseph Favell, 66.  
 — — on Bob Allen, 67.  
 — — on Lamb's appearance and dress in 1792-94, 77.  
 — — and Dyer's absent-mindedness, 162.  
 — — and Lamb's Primrose Hill joke, 164.  
 — — and Lamb in the country, 229.  
 — — his *Reflector*, Lamb's essays in, 278, 303, 320.  
 — — his story of Lamb and Hazlitt on the parapet, 285.  
 — — contesting with Lamb, 318.  
 — — his respect for Lamb, 318.  
 — — Barnes a schoolfellow of, 319.  
 — — his *Examiner* and Lamb's "Triumph of the Whale," 320, 321, 322, 329.  
 — — Crabb Robinson on, in 1812, 321.

- Hunt, Leigh, his article on the Prince of Wales, 322.
- his trial, 322.
- his imprisonment, 1813, 326.
- Lamb on his prison-room, 326.
- on the Lambs' visits, 326, 327.
- his rhyming epistle to Lamb, 327.
- his *Foliage*, 327.
- his special gift, 328.
- his *Indicator* and his account of Lamb, 328.
- his *London Journal* and his account of Lamb, 328.
- his fate as a writer, 329.
- not a very intimate friend of Lamb, 329.
- and Lamb's verses to Thornton Hunt, 330.
- and Lamb's Thursday evenings, 373, 374, 381, 386.
- Lamb's manner to, 376.
- introduces Procter to Lamb, 377.
- his talk, Hazlitt on, 380.
- described by Mrs. Cowden Clarke, 395.
- Shelley's letters to, 1819, on Lamb, 396.
- a friend of Novello, 397.
- and mutual entertainments with the Lambs and the Novellos, 399.
- Crabb Robinson on, in 1814, 404.
- and Talfourd, 404.
- and Lamb's *Works*, 406.
- his "Deaths of Little Children" and Mrs. Novello, 425.
- Crabb Robinson on, 1820, 426.
- his *London Journal* and Landor on *Elia*, 446.
- Mrs. Shelley's letter to, 489.
- in Italy, 489.
- Lamb's championship of, 459, 510.
- Crabb Robinson on, 1823, 511.
- on Lamb leaving London, 514.
- on Lamb's Thursday evenings, 515.
- Lamb's letter to, December, 1824, 532.
- Hazlitt on, 538.
- after his release, 541.
- and the Lambs coming to tea, 564.
- at Enfield, Westwood on, 589.
- and the *Literary Gazette's* attack on Lamb's *Album Verses*, 626, 627, 628.
- his *Examiner*, and "Rejected Epigrams" in, 626, 627.
- and the attacks on Lamb, 1830, 628.
- and Lamb on Coleridge's "fun," 667.
- Hunt, Leigh, Mrs., at the Lambs, 404.
- on Mary Lamb's illness, 407.
- Thomas (father of Mrs. Coe), and Lamb's visits to Widford, 572.
- Mrs., of Widford, and Lamb, 572, 575.
- Thornton, son of Leigh Hunt, Lamb's verses to ("To T. L. H."), 330.
- Hunted Down*, by Charles Dickens, and Wainewright, 440.
- Hunter, John, his sonnet to *Elia*, 451.
- Hutchinson, Mary, married to Wordsworth, 229.
- Sarah (Mrs. Wordsworth's sister), Crabb Robinson on, 354, 355.
- Mary Lamb's letter to, August 20th, 1815, about the Cambridge visit, 359, 360, 361.
- Lamb's postscript about Cambridge, 361.
- Lamb's letter to, September, 1815, about Mary Lamb's illness, 361.
- Mary Lamb's letter to, November, 1816, about the Dalston lodgings, 367, 368, 369.
- and Lamb on his life of Liston, 536.
- Lamb's letter to, March 1st, 1825, on his superannuation, 539, 541.
- Lamb's letter to, January, 1825, and Unitarians, 637.
- Mr. Thomas, on Lamb's "Confessions of a Drunkard," 339.
- on Coleridge's landlord, 432, footnote.
- Hyde Park in 1814, Lamb on, 345.
- Hymns in Prose*, by Mrs. Barbauld, 227, 323.
- "Hypocrite, The," by Isaac Bickerstaffe, and Miss Kelly in, 417.

## I

- Iago ("Othello"), Lamb on, 314.
- Iliad, The*, and Coleridge's monologue, 485.
- Illustrated London News* quoted, 55.
- Immorality, Lamb on, 344.
- "Imperfect Sympathies," 306, 451, 455, 460, 639.
- In the Days of Lamb and Coleridge*, 56, footnote.
- Inchbald, Mrs., Lamb on, 180, 432.
- India House. See East India House.
- Indicator, The*, Leigh Hunt on Lamb in, 328.
- Inner Temple Lane, No. 4, the Lambs move to, 1809, 294.
- described by Lamb, 294, 295, 299, 300.
- the Lambs' discovery there, 346, 347.

- Inner Temple Lane, No. 4, the Lambs move from, 1817, 371, 390.  
 — — — — and Lamb's Thursday evenings, 373.  
 Insects and Lamb, 516.  
 Irving, Edward, and Mrs. Montagu, 272.  
 — — and Coleridge, 432, 529, 555.  
 — — and Hone's conversion, 552.  
 Islington, Mary Lamb moved there after the tragedy in 1796, 98.  
 — the Lambs' early life there (Pentonville), 171.  
 — the Lambs living at, again, 1823, 496.  
 Isola, Agostino, grandfather of Emma Isola, 429.  
 — — teacher of Italian at Cambridge, 429.  
 — — Wordsworth a pupil of, 429.  
 — Charles, father of Emma Isola, 429.  
 — — his position at Cambridge, 429.  
 — — his death, 430.  
 — Emma, first meeting with the Lambs, 237, 429.  
 — — Lamb's letter on, 429, 430.  
 — — her father's death, 430.  
 — — adopted by the Lambs, 430.  
 — — and the portrait of Milton, 477.  
 — — her marriage with Moxon, 477.  
 — — and the Lambs helping her French, 487.  
 — — her holidays at the Lambs, 546.  
 — — her walks to Widford with Lamb, 571.  
 — — learning Latin, Lamb on, 583.  
 — — and Mary Lamb's sonnet to, 585, 593.  
 — — and the early days at Enfield Chase, 588.  
 — — at Enfield, Westwood on, 590.  
 — — her situation at Mrs. Williams's, 595.  
 — — described by Lamb, 604.  
 — — her Album, and Lamb, 604.  
 — — her Extract Book, and Lamb's contributions to, 604, 605, 606.  
 — — Lamb on, 616, 617.  
 — — a governess, 617.  
 — — her illness, and the Lambs, 620.  
 — — her journey from Fornham, 620, 621.  
 — — and "Miss Isola Lamb," 621, 622.  
 — — at the Lambs', 1830, 631.  
 — — and Lamb's second will, 631.  
 — — at the Lambs', 1832, 642.  
 — — Lamb's praise of, 644.  
 — — Lamb teaching Italian to, 644.  
 — — and Landor's visit, 645.  
 — — and Landor's poem to, 646.  
 — — and Lamb's letter to Landor, 646.  
 Isola, Emma, reading Dante with the Lambs, 648.  
 — — and Moxon as a suitor, 648.  
 — — Moxon's sonnets to, 648, 649.  
 — — her engagement to Moxon, 652, 653.  
 — — and her watch, Lamb on, 655.  
 — — her wedding, 1833, Lamb on, 656.  
 — — and Lamb's last years, 669.  
 — — Bella, and Miss Isola's ancestors, 621.  
 Italian, Charles and Mary reading Dante and Tasso, 648.  
 Ives, Abigail, of Widford, and Lamb, 574.
- J**
- J. B., his "Recollections of William Hazlitt," 538, 539.  
 "Jack Abbot's Breakfast," by Leigh Hunt, 163.  
 Jackson, Captain, 203.  
 — Mr. Richard C., 205.  
 Jacob, Lamb on, 518.  
 James, Miss Sarah, Mary Lamb's nurse, with the Lambs in France, 487, 489.  
 — — — with the Lambs at Hastings, 505.  
 — — — her riding, 505.  
 — — — with Mary Lamb at the Moxons, 684.  
 — — — her sister, Mrs. Parsons, Mary Lamb removed to, 685.  
 — — — and her great-nephew, John Hollingshead, 685.  
 — — — letting lodgings, 686.  
 — — — Lamb's letter and acrostic to, 687.  
 — — — writing a letter for Mary Lamb, 688.  
 Jeffs, Rev. Mr., who baptised Charles Lamb, 4.  
 Jenkins, Mrs., the present owner of Westwood Cottage, 617.  
 Jerdan, William, editor of the *Literary Gazette*, his attack on Lamb's *Album Verses*, 625, 626, 627.  
 — — and Southey's poem, 626.  
 — — attacked by Leigh Hunt, 626, 627.  
 — — and Tennyson's poems, 627.  
 — — and the *Last Essays of Elia*, 627.  
 Jesus Christ, Lamb on, 387, 388.  
 "Jew of Malta, The Rich," by Marlowe, Lamb's note on, 459.  
*Joan of Arc*, by Robert Southey, 84.  
 — — — and Coleridge's vision, 88.  
 — — — Lamb's criticism of, 91.  
 Job, The Book of, and Blake's illustrations to, 526.  
*John Woodvil* (originally called "Pride's Cure"), 18.  
 — — first begun, 120.



- John Woodvil*, sent by Lamb to Southey and Robert Lloyd, 142.  
 — — and George Dyer, 143.  
 — — and John Philip Kemble's offer, 174.  
 — — and Drury Lane, 180.  
 — — sent to the Wordsworths, 180.  
 — — and Kemble's request for another copy, 188.  
 — — definitely rejected, 194.  
 — — a copy "compounded" at Manning's request, 195.  
 — — the copy in America, 195.  
 — — and the Wordsworths, 197.  
 — — and Southey's, Rickman's and Coleridge's opinion of, 214.  
 — — Lamb prints, 1801, 224.  
 — — Lamb's loss on, 225, 671.  
 — — its many beauties, 225.  
 — — its reception by the critics, 226.  
 — — and Mrs. Barbauld, 226.  
 — — and De Quincey, 252.  
 — — and Lamb's *Works*, 406.  
 — — and Hazlitt's *British Poets*, 521.  
 Johnson, Mr. C. E., on the Plumers, 24.  
 — Dr. Samuel, and Richard Farmer, 144.  
 — — — his *Lives of the Poets*, Lamb on, 182.  
 — — — discussed by Miss Benger and Lamb, 182.  
 — — — his friendship with the Burneys, 233, 236.  
 — — — quoted in jest by Lamb, 306.  
 — — — his *Rambler*, 378.  
 — — — Boswell's *Life of*, 378, 381.  
 — — — and Lamb's evenings, 378.  
 — — — Lamb on, 381.  
 — — — his *Lives of the Poets* and Cary's continuation, 437.  
 Jokes, Lamb's, "Cancellarius Major," 155.  
 — — "No-bit," 163.  
 — — Castlereagh and the authorship of the Waverley Novels, 163.  
 — — on Primrose Hill and the Persian ambassador, 164.  
 — — "the two bald women" (Mrs. Barbauld and Mrs. Inchbald), 180.  
 — — in *The Morning Post*, 216, 217, 218, 221, 222, 223.  
 — — remuneration for, 218.  
 — — labour of making, 219, 220.  
 — — on Martin Burney's guardian angel, 236.  
 — — on Martin Burney's hand, 237.  
 — — when Greek meets Greek, 237.  
 — — on smoking, 240, 241.  
 — — "man as he ought not to be," 248.  
 — — Gum Boil and Tooth Ache, 262.  
 Jokes, Lamb's, *nocturnal* — alias *knock-eternal*—visitors, 266.  
 — — on Crabb Robinson's first brief, 280, 362.  
 — — in Miss Betham's anecdotes, 288.  
 — — on the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, 299.  
 — — "And panting Time," etc., 306.  
 — — on "the gentlemen who write with ease," 341.  
 — — on cannibalism, 342.  
 — — on the broken looking-glass, 358.  
 — — on Mr. Negus, 358.  
 — — on the prompter, 358.  
 — — an archangel a little damaged, 364, 367, footnote.  
 — — on "One fool making many," 369.  
 — — on a baby's long clothes, 395.  
 — — on "an ornament to Society," 405.  
 — — on a "party in a parlour," 410.  
 — — on "sitting," 432.  
 — — on Talma in Sylla, 488.  
 — — "A hare, and many friends," 492.  
 — — on the pudding, 501.  
 — — "Men Sects" and "Insects," 516.  
 — — "Turban, or hat?" 528.  
 — — on "Payne and Fuss," 529.  
 — — about Ben Jonson's things, 539.  
 — — and the schoolmaster, 580.  
 — — on the most vigorous line of poetry, 580.  
 — — his walking measures, 580.  
 — — on the turnip season and boiled mutton, 621.  
 — — on the Witch of End-door, 643.  
 — — his wish for his "last breath," 660.  
 — — concerning Coleridge, 667, 668.  
 Joking, Lamb on, 369.  
 — by Lamb, Hazlitt on, 538.  
 Jonson, Ben, on Bacon, quoted by Lamb, 311.  
 — — discussed at Lamb's evenings, 386.  
 — — his good and bad things, 539.  
 Jordan, Mrs., a favourite actress of Lamb's, 78.  
 — — her laugh and Novello, 398.  
 — — succeeded by Miss Kelly, 412.  
 — — Lamb on, 413.  
 — — her voice, Coleridge on, 558, 559.  
 Joseph, G. F., A.R.A., his portrait of Lamb, 350.  
 Journalism and Lamb, 214, 215, 216, 218, 219, 221, 223.  
 "Jovial Crew, The," by Richard Brome, Lamb on Miss Kelly in, 414.  
 Judas Iscariot and Lamb's wish to see, 387.  
 Judd, Mr., the present owner of Lamb's cottage, Edmonton, 654.

- Judgment in women, Mary Lamb on, 246.  
 "Julia," by S. T. Coleridge, 54.  
*Julie de Roubigné*, by Henry Mackenzie, its influence on *Rosamund Gray*, 140.  
 Junius, identified by John Taylor, 37.  
 — and Lamb's evenings, 378, 385.
- K**
- Kean, Charles, as Richard II., 355.  
 — as Sir Giles Overreach, 363.  
 — in "Timon," 369, 370.  
 Keats, George, John Keats's letter to, on Lamb, 1819, 395.  
 — John, at Haydon's party, 392, 393, 394.  
 — and Lamb, 393, 395.  
 — on Lamb's joke on a baby, 395.  
 — his "Endymion," 395.  
 — his death, 395.  
 — his "St. Agnes' Eve," Lamb's review of, 395.  
 — described by Mrs. Cowden Clarke, 395.  
 — and "Mistessy," 437.  
 — Lamb on, 568.  
 — and Cowden Clarke, 602, 603.  
 Keepsakes and relics, and Lamb, 651.  
 Kelly, Fanny Maria, taught Latin by Mary Lamb, 49, 417.  
 — — — Lamb's later divinity, 78.  
 — — — and Lamb's confidences, 141.  
 — — — at the Lyceum, or English Opera, 336.  
 — — — at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 374.  
 — — — and Novello, 398, 399.  
 — — — her "divine plain face," 402, 413, 416.  
 — — — her birth and early life, 412.  
 — — — and "Barbara S.," 412.  
 — — — Lamb's sonnet to, 412, 413.  
 — — — Lamb's proposal to, 413, 414.  
 — — — Lamb's criticisms of, 413, 414, 417.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, July 20th, 1819, 415, 416.  
 — — — her letter of refusal, 416.  
 — — — her other admirers, 416.  
 — — — Lamb's letter of reply, July 20th, 1819, 417.  
 — — — her death, 417.  
 — — — Mrs. Cowden Clarke's recollection of, 418.  
 — — — and "Dream Children," 418.  
 — — — Crabb Robinson on, 430.  
 — — — at the Lambs', 1820, 430.  
 — — — her half-sister, Mrs. Mathews, 464.  
 Kelly, Fanny Maria, and Lamb at Munden's retirement, 527.  
 — — — and Hoods' baby, 576.  
 — — — described by Mrs. Balmanno, 581.  
 — — — Lamb's manner to, 581.  
 — — — at Enfield, Thomas Westwood on, 589, 590.  
 — — — at Enfield, Crabb Robinson on, 595.  
 — — — and Lamb and porter, 599.  
 — — — her fondness for little frogs, 672.  
 — — — visiting Mary Lamb at Alpha Road, 686.  
 — — — and Mrs. Keeley, 687.  
 Kemble, Charles, at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 374.  
 — — — Lamb sends his "Pawnbroker's Daughter" to, 586.  
 — — — Fanny, on Mr. and Mrs. Basil Montagu, 272.  
 — — — John Philip, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.  
 — — — and Lamb's play of *John Woodvil*, 174, 188.  
 — — — Lamb on, in "Antonio," 191, 192, 193.  
 — — — his acting compared with Braham's singing, 287.  
 Kenilworth, Lamb on, 495.  
 Kenney, James, the dramatist, and Lamb, 231.  
 — — — marries the widow of Holcroft, 231, 322.  
 — — — Robinson on, 322.  
 — — — at Godwin's, 341.  
 — — — on Hazlitt's practical philosophy, 476.  
 — — — the Lambs staying with, at Versailles, 487, 489.  
 — — — on Lamb and Talma, 488.  
 — — — his household described by Mrs. Shelley, 489.  
 — — — his praise of Mary Lamb, 489.  
 — — — at Lamb's evenings, 515.  
 — — — his son Charles Lamb Kenney, 617.  
 — — — gives a sad account of Lamb, 1832, 642.  
 — — — Mrs., and Manning, 388.  
 — — — her daughter Louisa, 489.  
 — — — and Mary Lamb in Paris, 490.  
 — — — Mary Lamb's letter to, 1822, 490.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, September 11th, 1822, 491.  
 — — — Sophy (Lamb's "child wife"), Lamb's letter to, September 11th, 1822, 491.  
 Kent, Charles, his memoir of Miss Kelly, 413, 417.

- Kent, James, his air "O that I had Wings like a Dove," Lamb's love for, 345.
- Kenyon, John, meets the Lambs at Monkhouse's, 430.
- Keswick, Charles and Mary at, 228, 468, 469.
- Coleridge leaves, 1803, 245.
- Kew, the old palace, Mary Lamb at, 369.
- Keymer, Mr., and Lamb on the death of Coleridge, 666.
- "King John," Lamb on, 314.
- King, Mr. William, George Dyer's letter to, 145.
- King and Queen of Hearts, The*, Lamb's first book for children, 256.
- King's Bench, Hone imprisoned there, 552.
- Kingston, Mr., Comptroller of Stamps, and Wordsworth, 392, 393, 394.
- Kneller, Sir Godfrey, his portraits of Newton and Locke, Lamb on, 381.
- "Knocking on the Gate, in 'Macbeth,'" by De Quincey, Lamb on, 469.
- Knole, the Lambs at, 505.
- Knowles, James Sheridan, and Hazlitt and Lamb, 427.
- — — his "Virginius" and Macready, 427.
- — — at Lamb's, 549.
- — — his "Virginius" and "William Tell," 549.
- — — Crabb Robinson on, 549.
- — — William Hazlitt his friend, 549.
- — — at Enfield, Westwood on, 590.
- — — his sonnet on Bewick's drawing of Hazlitt, 605.
- — — his comedy "The Wife," 652.
- "Kubla Khan," Coleridge recites, 364.
- L**
- Lady of the Manor*, 43.
- Lakes, The, Crabb Robinson at, 369.
- Lamb family in 1775, 3.
- — probably leave the Temple, 75.
- — living at No. 7 Little Queen Street, Holborn, in 1794, 75.
- — described by Southey, 84.
- — in September, 1795, 93, 96.
- — leave Little Queen Street for 45 Chapel Street, Pentonville, December, 1796, 111.
- Elizabeth, Charles Lamb's mother, 3.
- her son John her favourite, 6, 99.
- her resemblance to Mrs. Siddons, 6.
- never rightly understands Mary, 6, 99.
- housekeeper to Samuel Salt, 11.
- signs the petition to Christ's Hospital, 46.
- Lamb, Elizabeth, Salt's bequests to, 74, 75.
- — her invalid appearance in 1794-95, 84.
- — her helpless state, 92.
- — her tragic death, 93.
- — Charles's regrets for, 107.
- — — poems on, 121, 122, 123.
- — — veiled references in *Eliä*, 123.
- Charles, birth of, February 10th, 1775, 1.
- — his predecessors and contemporaries, 1.
- — his grandparents, 2.
- — christened by the Rev. Mr. Jeffs, 4.
- — his father, 4.
- — his mother, 7.
- — and Samuel Salt, 7.
- — his godfather, Francis Fielde, 9.
- — his chief companion in childhood, 11.
- — his Aunt Hetty, 11.
- — as a child, 11.
- — his night fears and fancies, 15, 16, 17.
- — sacrifices his aunt's plum-cake, 18.
- — his Hertfordshire relations, 20.
- — and his grandmother, 28, 33.
- — at Blakesware, 29, 30, 31, 33.
- — his brother John, 34, 35.
- — his acquaintance in Widford, 35.
- — his thoughtfulness as a child, 38.
- — has small-pox at five, 38.
- — his lameness when a child, 38.
- — his precocity, 38.
- — his first schoolmistress, 38.
- — his first school, 40.
- — his first play, 1780, 43.
- — enters Christ's Hospital, 1782, 46.
- — meets Coleridge, 1782, 47.
- — his advantages over his schoolfellows, 48, 49.
- — and the masters, 51.
- — a Deputy Grecian, 54.
- — his earliest known composition, 1789, 54.
- — his fate averted by his stammer, 56.
- — as a schoolboy, 61.
- — his schoolfellows, 66, 67, 68, 69.
- — leaves Christ's Hospital, 1789, 70.
- — and Thomas Coventry, 70.
- — and Joseph Paice, 72.
- — enters the South-Sea House, 1791, 73.
- — leaves the South-Sea House, 1792, 74.
- — leaves the Temple, 1792, 75.
- — his first love, 75.



- Lamb, Charles, enters the East India House, 1792, 75.
- — his grandmother dies, 1792, 76.
- — as Mr. "Guy," 77.
- — a confirmed playgoer, 78.
- — at the Salutation Tavern with Coleridge, 1794, 79.
- — his love story ended, 1794, 80, 81.
- — his brief madness, 81.
- — his love sonnets, 81, 82.
- — and Alice W—, 83.
- — first meeting with Southey, 1795, 84.
- — and James White, 85.
- — and the *Falstaff Letters*, 85.
- — and his sister, 89.
- — asked by Coleridge for poetic contributions, 1796, 89.
- — his love for Priestley, 90.
- — the tragedy of September 22nd, 1796, 93, 96.
- — destroys his manuscripts, 94, 104.
- — procures his sister's release and places her in a private asylum, 95.
- — his income in 1796, 98.
- — on his sister's virtues, 99, 100.
- — on his mother, 99.
- — effect of the tragedy on, 102.
- — endeavours to reconcile Coleridge with Southey, 103.
- — his literary interest revives, 1796, 105.
- — inscribes his poems to his sister, 106, 107.
- — his home life, 108.
- — moves to 45 Chapel Street, Pentonville, December, 1796, 111.
- — and Charles Lloyd, 113.
- — his thoughts of turning Quaker, 1797, 113.
- — cured of Quakerism, 114.
- — his Aunt Hetty's death, 1797, 114.
- — removes Mary from her asylum into lodgings at Hackney, 1797, 116.
- — visits Stowey, 1797, 116.
- — meets the Wordsworths, 117.
- — begins *John Woodvil* and *Rosamund Gray*, 1797, 120, 129.
- — visits Southey, 121.
- — writes poems on his mother's death, 121, 122.
- — removes Mary into restraint again, 1798, 126.
- — writes "The Old Familiar Faces," 1798, 128.
- — his estrangement from Coleridge, 1798, 129, 131, 132, 133.
- — visits Lloyd, 1798, 130, 139.
- — the quarrel made up, 134.
- Lamb, Charles, and *The Anti-Jacobin*, 1798, 136, 137.
- — *Rosamund Gray* published, 1798, 139.
- — meets Robert Lloyd, 1798, 141.
- — corresponds with Southey, 141.
- — and George Dyer, 144-67.
- — his father's death, 1799, 169.
- — Mary at last joins him, 1799, 169.
- — moves from 45 to 36 Chapel Street, 1799, 171.
- — meets Thomas Manning, 1799, 175.
- — begins to be himself, 176.
- — reopens correspondence with Coleridge, 1800, 178.
- — first meets Godwin, 1800, 178, 179.
- — urged to journalistic work by Coleridge, 1800, 179.
- — and *The Morning Post*, 180.
- — Mary ill again, 1800, 182.
- — his servant Hetty dies, 182.
- — obliged to leave Pentonville, 1800, 183.
- — stays with James White, 183.
- — lodges with Gutch at 34 Southampton Buildings, 1800, 183.
- — is joined there by Mary, 183.
- — meets John Rickman, 1800, 186.
- — criticises the *Lyrical Ballads*, 1801, 196.
- — moves to Mitre Court Buildings, 1801, 198.
- — joins and ruins *The Albion*, 1801, 199, 200.
- — his friends in 1801, 210.
- — his religion, 210.
- — to Thomas Manning on religion, 211.
- — at Margate with Mary, 1801, 211.
- — and the second Mrs. Godwin, 212.
- — as journalist in 1801-4, 214-23.
- — prints *John Woodvil*, 1802, 224.
- — loses Manning who goes to France, 1802, 227.
- — visits Coleridge at Keswick, 1802, 227.
- — meets the Burneys, 1803, 233.
- — meets the Ayrtons, 1803, 237.
- — writes "Hester," 1803, 238.
- — visits the Isle of Wight, 1803, 242.
- — loses Coleridge again, who goes to Malta, 1804, 246.
- — his portrait painted by Hazlitt, 1804, 248.
- — introduced to Hazlitt by Coleridge, 248.
- — visited by De Quincey at the India House, 252, 253, 254.

- Lamb, Charles, his first book for children, 1805, 256.
- — and the death of Captain Wordsworth, 1805, 257.
- — his "Farewell to Tobacco," 1805, 261.
- — sees Nelson, 262.
- — and George Dawe, 263, 264.
- — finishes "Mr. H.," 1806, 266.
- — loses Manning again, who sails for China, 1806, 270, 271.
- — writes *Tales from Shakespear*, 1806, 271.
- — "Mr. H." accepted, 1806, 272.
- — "Mr. H." fails, 1806, 276.
- — his Wednesday evenings, 279.
- — meets Crabb Robinson, 1806, 279.
- — his visit to the Colliers, 280, 281.
- — *Tales from Shakespear* published, 1807, 282.
- — his annoyance in the illustrations, 282.
- — begins *The Adventures of Ulysses*, 1807, 283.
- — visits the Clarksons with Mary, 1807, 283.
- — first news of *Dramatic Specimens*, 1807, 283.
- — his presents of books to Matilda Betham, 288.
- — introduces Crabb Robinson to Wordsworth, 1808, 289.
- — at Hazlitt's wedding, 1808, 289.
- — *Dramatic Specimens* published, 1808, 289.
- — his *Adventures of Ulysses* published, 1808, 292.
- — *Mrs. Leicester's School* published, 1809, 292.
- — leaves Mitre Court Buildings for 34 Southampton Buildings, 1809, 294.
- — moves to No. 4 Inner Temple Lane, 1809, 294.
- — *Poetry for Children* published, 1809, 296, 297.
- — visits the Hazlitts, 1809, 298.
- — visits the Hazlitts again, 1810, 300.
- — at Oxford, 1810, 300.
- — begins to write for *The Reflector*, 1810, 303.
- — Crabb Robinson's *Diary* begun, 1811, 305.
- — and George Burnett's death, 1811, 307.
- — *Prince Dorus* published, 1811, 310.
- — his memoir of Robert Lloyd, 1811, 313.
- — at Hazlitt's christening party, 1812, 317.
- Lamb, Charles, and Benjamin Robert Haydon, 317, 318.
- — first attack by the *Quarterly Review*, 1811, 319.
- — and Thomas Barnes, 319, 320.
- — his "Triumph of the Whale," 1812, 320, 321, 322, 329.
- — becomes a landed proprietor, 1812, 325.
- — his prologue to Coleridge's "Remorse," 1813, 326.
- — his visits to Hunt in prison, 1813, 327, 329, 330.
- — his "Confessions of a Drunkard," 1813, 331.
- — his weekly parties altered to monthly, 1814, 342.
- — begins to write for *The Champion*, 1814, 342.
- — his review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, 1814, 345, 346.
- — and his new room, 1814, 347.
- — his first meeting with Talfourd, 1815, 350.
- — his salary in 1815, 353, 354, 363.
- — on Buonaparte, 1815, 355.
- — at Mackery End, 1815, 355, 356, 357.
- — with Mary at Cambridge, 1815, 361.
- — at Calne, 1816, 363, 365.
- — begins rusticating at Dalston, 1816, 367, 368.
- — at Brighton, 1817, 372, 391.
- — his "Thursday" evenings described by Talfourd, 373.
- — — — — by Procter, 375.
- — — — — by Hazlitt, 378.
- — and Manning's return, 1817, 388.
- — moves to Great Russell Street, 1817, 390.
- — at Haydon's party, 1817, 392, 393, 394.
- — meets Keats, 393, 395.
- — and Shelley, 395, 396.
- — and Mrs. Shelley, 396.
- — and the Novellos, 395, 397, 398, 399.
- — his *Works* issued, 1818, 401, 404.
- — plagued by visitors, 1818, 402, 403, 404.
- — at Birmingham, 1818, 405.
- — described by Philarète Chasles, 407, 408.
- — — — — by Procter, 408, 409.
- — his proposal to Miss Kelly, 1819, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417.
- — his salary in 1819, 414.
- — and the dedication of Wordsworth's *Waggoner*, 1819, 418, 419.

- Lamb, Charles, his visit to Cambridge, 1819, 419.
- — with Elliston and Munden, 420.
- — his generosity to Morgan, 1819, 423, 424.
- — his epigrams in *The Champion*, 426, 427.
- — at Cambridge, 1820, 428.
- — meets Emma Isola, 429, 430.
- — joins the *London Magazine*, 1820, 434, 436, 441, 442, 443.
- — and "Janus Weathercock," 438, 439, 440.
- — on the name of *Elia*, 442.
- — and the *Essays of Elia*, 442, 443, 444, 446.
- — his golden year, 1821, 460.
- — and Scott's death, 1821, 461.
- — at Charles Mathews's, 1821, 464, 477.
- — at Margate, 1821, 464.
- — his brother's death, 1821, 465, 466, 483.
- — and Admiral Burney's death, 1821, 465, 466.
- — and James White's death, 1821, 466.
- — as "A Man of the World" saw him in 1822, 484.
- — visits France, 1822, 487, 488.
- — meets Talma, 1822, 488.
- — his child-wife, 491.
- — meets Hood, 1822, 491, 492.
- — meets Bernard Barton, 1822, 491, 492, 493, 494.
- — helps Godwin, 1822, 494, 495.
- — and Sir Walter Scott, 1822, 494, 495.
- — *Elia* published, 1823, 496.
- — at Monkhouse's dinner-party, 1823, 502.
- — meets Thomas Moore, 1823, 502.
- — meets J. B. Dibdin, 1823, 504, 505.
- — in Kent, 1823, 505.
- — at Hastings, 1823, 506, 507.
- — his "Letter to Southey," 1823, 508, 509, 510.
- — his reconciliation with Southey, 1823, 513.
- — moves to Colebrooke Cottage, 1823, 513, 514.
- — first makes his will, 1823, 518.
- — and George Dyer's immersion, 1823, 519.
- — at the Mansion House, 1823, 519.
- — losing interest in the *London*, 1824, 520.
- — and Hazlitt's *British Poets*, 1824, 521.
- — meets P. G. Patmore, 1824, 523.
- Lamb, Charles, on Blake, 1824, 525.
- — on Byron's death, 1824, 526.
- — and Munden's retirement, 1824, 526, 527.
- — disputing with Mrs. Barbauld, 1824, 527.
- — and Edward Irving, 1824, 529.
- — *Elia* resumed, 1824, 531.
- — his "step-wife," 531, 532.
- — "Saint Charles," 533, 534.
- — his favourite lie, 536.
- — writes the *Lepus* papers, 1825, 536.
- — released from the India House, 1825, 540.
- — his portrait painted by Meyer, 1826, 545, 562.
- — and William Hone, 550.
- — stays at Enfield with the Allsops, 1825, 550.
- — writes "The Pawnbroker's Daughter," 1825, 553.
- — leaves the *London Magazine*, 1825, 553.
- — Brooke Pulham's caricature, 1826, 563.
- — meets Edward Moxon, 1826, 563, 564.
- — begins the Garrick plays, 1826, 567.
- — his dog Dash, 569, 570.
- — and the death of Randal Norris, 1827, 571, 576.
- — and Mrs. Coe's reminiscences, 571-75.
- — visits Widford, 572, 574, 575.
- — his efforts to help Mrs. Norris, 1827, 576.
- — writes poem on the death of Hood's child, 1827, 576.
- — at Enfield again, 1827, 578.
- — Hood's *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* dedicated to, 1827, 579.
- — writes the "Wife's Trial," 1827, 584.
- — teaches Emma Latin, 1827, 584, 585.
- — his verses "In My Own Album," 1827, 586.
- — takes house at Enfield, 1827, and leaves Islington, 587.
- — and the Cowden Clarkes, 1828, 596.
- — and *Elia* in America, 1828, 603.
- — he fills Emma Isola's *Extract Book*, 604, 605, 606.
- — writes "The Gypsy's Malison," 1829, 606, 607.
- — vows to write for *Antiquity*, 1829, 607.
- — and Becky, 1829, 609, 610, 611.
- — his solitude in London, 1829, 611, 619.



- Lamb, Charles, gives up housekeeping and joins the Westwoods, 1829, 613, 614.
- — a Paris edition of his poems, 1829, 618.
- — his electioneering squibs, 1829, 618.
- — and Miss Isola's illness, 1830, 620.
- — his share in the Hone subscription, 1830, 624.
- — *Album Verses* published, 1830, 624, 625.
- — attacked in the *Literary Gazette*, 1830, 625, 626, 627.
- — and Southey's poem of praise, 1830, 626.
- — takes lodging in London, 1830, 628.
- — writes his "Free Thoughts on Some Eminent Composers," 1830, 629, 630.
- — and Hazlitt's death, 1830, 630, 631.
- — makes his second will, 1830, 631.
- — writes *Satan in Search of a Wife*, 1830, 631, 636.
- — writes for the *Englishman's Magazine*, 1831, 632, 635, 636.
- — intervenes about Coleridge's pension, 1831, 633, 634, 635.
- — and Munden's death, 1832, 642.
- — and "Christopher North," 1832, 643, 644.
- — and Landor, 1832, 644, 645, 646.
- — and his pensioners, 1832, 647.
- — and *The Reflector*, 1832, 647.
- — *The Last Essays of Elia* published, 1833, 647.
- — sits for the portraits of sixteen British Admirals, 651.
- — writes prologue and epilogue for Sheridan Knowles' "The Wife," 1833, 652.
- — moves to Edmonton, 1833, 652.
- — meets Valentine Le Grice again, 1833, 655.
- — meets Rickman and Godwin again, 1833, 655.
- — Emma Isola's wedding, 1833, 656.
- — a statuette of, 659.
- — meets Nathaniel Parker Willis, 1834, 663.
- — and the death of Coleridge, 1834, 666, 667, 669.
- — and Mary in their Edmonton home, 1834, 670.
- — at his last dinner-party, 1834, 673, 674.
- — his last letter, 1834, 674.
- — his accident, 1834, 674.
- — his death, 1834, 675.
- — his funeral, 675.
- Lamb, Charles, his epitaph by Wordsworth, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679.
- — the memorial to, in Edmonton Church, 680.
- — John, Charles Lamb's father, his Sunday morning joke, 3.
- — a scrivener by profession, 4.
- — description of, by Lamb, 4, 7, 169.
- — books belonging to, 5.
- — his *Poetical Pieces on Several Occasions*, 5, 84, 471.
- — his petition to Christ's Hospital, 46.
- — Salt's bequests to, 74.
- — his failing health in 1792, 76.
- — described by Southey, 1794-95, 84.
- — and the tragedy, 94, 96.
- — his loss of memory, 97.
- — his exactingness, 108.
- — Samuel Le Grice's kindness to, 97.
- — and *Rosamund Gray*, 140.
- — his death, 1799, 169.
- — on Garrick, 169.
- — on his boyhood, 169.
- — buried at St. James's, Clerkenwell, 170.
- — his will, 170.
- — and *Poetry for Children*, 297.
- — the younger, his birth, June 5th, 1763, 3.
- — — his resemblance to his mother, 6.
- — — his mother's favourite, 6, 99.
- — — at the South-Sea House, 8, 73, 471, 472.
- — — his grandmother's favourite, 26, 471.
- — — described in "Dream Children," 35, 470, 471, 483.
- — — assistance to his family uncertain, 75.
- — — a bondsman for Charles Lamb, 76.
- — — his accident, 89, 471.
- — — his exemption from duty, 96, 471.
- — — his brotherly advice, 98.
- — — his depreciation of Coleridge, 104.
- — — at the performance of "Mr. H.," 1806, 276.
- — — his contribution to *Poetry for Children*, 297, 477.
- — — Crabb Robinson's dislike of, 362, 431, 470, 476, 477.
- — — knocks down Hazlitt, 1816, 367, 476.
- — — and Charles's Thursday evenings, 373.

- Lamb, John, the younger, his death, 1821,  
465, 477, 482, 483.  
— — — described in "My Relations,"  
470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475,  
476, 482.  
— — — Charles's sonnet on, 470.  
— — — in his father's *Poetical Pieces*,  
470, 471.  
— — — his fondness for pictures, 472,  
474.  
— — — his contradictions, 473.  
— — — and cruelty to animals, 475,  
478, 479, 480.  
— — — Talfourd on, 476.  
— — — his personal appearance, 476,  
478.  
— — — and the Milton portrait, 477.  
— — — on the Corn Laws, 480, 481,  
482.  
— — — on his religion, 480.  
— — — and books, 481.  
— — — his marriage, 482.  
— — — his will, 482, 483.  
— — — Charles's grief for his death,  
483.  
— — — his widow's death, 549.  
— — — Mary Anne, her birth, December 3rd,  
1764, 3.  
— — — not rightly understood by her  
mother, 6, 99.  
— — — "tumbled into" Samuel Salt's  
library, 8.  
— — — her care of Charles in child-  
hood, 11.  
— — — her only school, 42.  
— — — her first play, 44.  
— — — a mantua maker, 75, 93, 348.  
— — — her first illness, 79.  
— — — her frenzy and the result, 1796,  
93.  
— — — her release procured by Charles,  
she is placed in a private  
asylum, 95.  
— — — her recovery, 108.  
— — — her relapse, January, 1797, 112.  
— — — moved into lodgings at Hack-  
ney, 1797, 116.  
— — — her calm memories of her  
mother, 123.  
— — — her return to the asylum, 1798,  
126.  
— — — joins her brother at Chapel  
Street, Pentonville, 1799,  
169.  
— — — and the Bluestockings, 181.  
— — — her illness, 1800, 182.  
— — — joins her brother at South-  
ampton Buildings, 1800, 183.  
— — — her ballad of "Helen," 184.  
— — — copies *John Woodvil* for Man-  
ning, 1800, 195.
- Lamb, Mary Anne, moves with her brother  
to Mitre Court Buildings,  
1801, 198.  
— — — visits Keswick with Charles,  
1802, 227.  
— — — her mountaineering, 228.  
— — — her illness, 1803, 239.  
— — — her slow recovery, 241.  
— — — her other early poems, 247.  
— — — her letter and poem on John  
Wordsworth's death, 1805,  
257, 258.  
— — — her illness in 1805, 258, 260.  
— — — as "Bridget Elia," 259, 260.  
— — — her love of pictures, 269.  
— — — begins the *Tales from Shake-  
spear*, 1806, 271.  
— — — her illness in 1807, 283.  
— — — at Sarah Stoddart's wedding,  
1808, 289.  
— — — her *Mrs. Leicester's School*,  
1809, 292.  
— — — Landor's admiration of her  
writing, 292.  
— — — her illness, 1809, 295.  
— — — and *Poetry for Children*, 1809,  
296, 297.  
— — — her visit to Winterslow, 1809,  
299.  
— — — at Winterslow again, 1810,  
300.  
— — — her illness in 1810, 301.  
— — — glad to be an old maid, 303.  
— — — her illness in 1811, 308.  
— — — her (?) verses on the birth of  
Hazlitt's son, 312.  
— — — at Hazlitt's christening party,  
1812, 317.  
— — — her illness in 1812, 319.  
— — — her illness at Windsor, 1813,  
341.  
— — — her discovery at 4 Inner Temple  
Lane, 1814, 346.  
— — — her article "On Needlework,"  
1814, 348.  
— — — learns Latin, 348.  
— — — her illness in 1814, 348-49.  
— — — her first joke, 354.  
— — — her protracted illness in 1815,  
354, 361, 362.  
— — — at Mackery End, 1815, 355,  
356, 357.  
— — — her visit to Cambridge, 1815,  
359, 360, 361.  
— — — her visit to Kew, 1816, 369.  
— — — her illness in 1817, 372.  
— — — her visit to Brighton, 1817,  
372, 391.  
— — — at a cottage near Rochester,  
399.  
— — — her illness in 1818, 407, 410.

- Lamb, Mary Anne, and the attempt on Miss Kelly's life, 416.
- — — her Latin pupils, 417.
- — — with Crabb Robinson at Cambridge, 1820, 428.
- — — her illness in 1820, 430.
- — — her illness in 1821, 465.
- — — and Martin Burney's difficulties, 465.
- — — the visit to France, 1822, 487.
- — — her illness at Amiens, 489, 502.
- — — with Crabb Robinson in Paris, 489, 490.
- — — fails to smuggle Crabb Robinson's waistcoat, 490, 491.
- — — in Kent, 1823, 505.
- — — at Hastings, 1823, 506.
- — — her pun on Munden's retirement, 1823, 527.
- — — her illness, 1825, 555.
- — — with Charles and Coleridge, 557.
- — — Hood's caricature of, 578, 579.
- — — her sonnet "To Emma Learning Latin," 1827, 585.
- — — her long illness in 1827, 588.
- — — teaches Thomas Westwood Latin, 590.
- — — her recovery, 1827, 594.
- — — her illness in 1829, 611.
- — — gives up housekeeping, 1829, 613, 615.
- — — her illness in 1830, 631.
- — — well again, 631, 633.
- — — her probable illnesses in 1832, 642, 643, 644.
- — — her illness and removal to Edmonton, 1833, 652.
- — — Anne Betham's legacy to, 654.
- — — and Emma Isola's marriage, 1833, 655, 656.
- — — her sudden recovery, 656, 657.
- — — her long illness again, 1834, 660.
- — — and the death of Charles, 1834, 675, 681.
- — — moved to St. John's Wood, 1841, 685.
- — — her visitors, 686, 687.
- — — her customs in her old age, 687.
- — — her death, 1847, 688.
- Sarah (Aunt Hetty), 3.
- — her affection for Charles, 11.
- — described in "My Relations," 11.
- — in "Poor Relations," 12.
- — affronts Mr. Billet, 12.
- — described in "The Witch Aunt," 14.
- — Mary Lamb on, 17.
- Lamb, Sarah, her practical kindness, 18, 19, 51, 114.
- — and Charles's Unitarianism, 90.
- — and the tragedy, 1796, 96.
- — and the rich relative, 97, 110.
- — her return to the Lambs, 110.
- — moves with the Lambs to Pentonville, 111.
- — her death and funeral, February, 1797, 114.
- — described by Lamb in a letter, 114.
- — Lamb's lines on, 114.
- Landon, L. E., Lamb on, 433.
- Landor, Walter Savage, 1.
- — — his admiration of *Mrs. Leicester's School*, 292.
- — — on *Elia*, 446, 447.
- — — his praise of Westwood's poem, 592.
- — — his "Rose Aylmer" and Lamb, 644, 645, 646.
- — — his "Gebir" and Lamb, 644.
- — — his visit to Lamb, 1832, 645.
- — — his lines on his visit, 645.
- — — on Lamb and on *Elia*, 645.
- — — his poem for Miss Isola's album, 646.
- — — Lamb's letter to, 1832, 646.
- — — Lamb's gift of his *Last Essays of Elia*, 648.
- — — at Florence, 659.
- — — his letter to Lamb, 1833, Lamb on, 659.
- — — and N. P. Willis, 663.
- — — his poem "To the Sister of Elia," 681, 683.
- — — on the death of Lamb, 683.
- — — on Mary Lamb and her writing, 683, 684.
- — — and Crabb Robinson, 683.
- — — his letter to Lady Blessington, March 16th, 1835, 683, 684.
- Landseer, Thomas, at Haydon's party, 392.
- Lang, Mr. Andrew, and Sir Walter Scott's invitation to Lamb, 495.
- Lansdowne, Marquis of, Lamb on his pictures, 268.
- Latin, Charles and Mary discuss, 49.
- mock-specimens of, by Lamb and by Manning, 175.
- Lamb teaches Emma Isola, 584.
- and Mary Lamb, 585, 590.
- Lamb's letters in, 633.
- Lavengro*, by George Borrow, 208.
- "Lay of the Laureate, The," by Hazlitt, and Lamb, 338.
- "Lay Sermon," by S. T. Coleridge, 366.
- Leadenhall Street and the East India House, 536, 543, 545.



- Leamington, Lamb meets Elliston at, 420.
- Lear, Lamb's essay on, and Barnes, 320.
- Le Breton, Mrs., her *Memories of Seventy Years*, on Dyer's absent-mindedness, 163.
- Lee & Hurst, the publishers of *Rosamund Gray*, 139.
- "Leech-gatherer, The," by Wordsworth, Lamb on, 306.
- "Legend of Good Women," by Chaucer, and Lamb's evenings, 386.
- Le Grice, Charles Valentine, a contributor to Boyer's *Liber Aureus*, 56.
- — — — on Lamb at school, 61, 62.
- — — — his wit-combats with Coleridge, 62.
- — — — his pranks at Cambridge, 63.
- — — — his career, 64.
- — — — Lord Courtney's description of, 64.
- — — — his holidays at the Lambs, 65.
- — — — on Lamb's wit and humour, 65.
- — — — his reminiscences of Coleridge and Lamb, 65.
- — — — his story of Lamb as Mr. "Guy," 77.
- — — — goes to Cornwall, 89.
- — — — his sonnet on Charles and Mary walking to Hoxton Asylum, 174, footnote.
- — — — dining with Lamb at Edmonton, 1833, 655.
- — Samuel, a contributor to Boyer's *Liber Aureus*, 56.
- — — — described by Leigh Hunt, 66.
- — — — Lamb's character of, 66.
- — — — his goodness to the Lambs, 97.
- — — — his death, 231.
- Leishman, Mrs., Chase Side, Enfield, the Lambs lodging with, 578.
- L'Enclos, Ninon de, Mary Lamb's wish to see, 387.
- Leonardo da Vinci, his "Modestia et Vanitas" and Mary Lamb's verses, 247, 558.
- — — — one of Lamb's chief favourites, 268.
- — — — his "Virgin of the Rocks," Lamb's delight in, 364.
- — — — his "Vierge au Ligne" given to Lamb by Crabb Robinson, 369.
- Lepaux, the Theophilanthropist, attacked in *The Anti-Jacobin*, 136.
- Lepus Papers, The, by Lamb, in *The New Times*, 212.
- Lepus on Mrs. Priscilla Pry, 212.
- on Tom Pry, 213.
- Crabb Robinson on, 536.
- Leslie, C. R., his *Autobiographical Recollections* (Lamb and the Gillmans' pudding), 501.
- — — — his record of Coleridge on Lamb, 668.
- "Letter from a Child to its Grandmother," by John Lamb, senior, and John Lamb, junior, 471.
- "Letter of Elia to Robert Southey," 230, 251, 456, 459, 496, 508, 509.
- — — — *The Times* on, 510.
- — — — *Blackwood* on, 510.
- — — — Crabb Robinson on, 511.
- — — — and Coleridge and Hazlitt, 511.
- — — — Southey's letter of reply, 512.
- — — — and Hazlitt's essay on "The Pleasures of Hating," 521.
- "Letter to an Old Gentleman whose Education has been Neglected" and De Quincey, 535.
- Letter to the Right Hon. William Windham, on his Opposition to Lord Erskine's Bill for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, A*, 1810, by John Lamb, 478, 479, 480.
- Letters, Lamb on, 636.
- Letters from the Lake Poets*, and Coleridge's bounty from the Treasury, 635.
- Letters to an Enthusiast*, by Mrs. Cowden Clarke, and Lamb at Enfield, 599, 600.
- Lewis, "Gentleman," his opinion of "Mr. H.," 277.
- Monk, his castle spectre, Wordsworth on, 199.
- Liber Aureus of Christ's Hospital, 54, 55.
- Library, Lamb's. See under Books.
- Lily, John, the postilion at Blakesware, 29.
- — described in poem "Gone or Going," 36, 37.
- Lincoln, John Lamb's boyhood there, 3.
- Lincolnshire, native county of the Lamb family, 1.
- "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew Tree," by Wordsworth, 120, footnote.
- "Lines Suggested by a Picture of Two Females," by Mary Lamb, and Coleridge, 558, footnote.
- "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," by Wordsworth, Lamb's praise of, 142.
- Lintot, Bernard, John Lamb on, 481.

- Lions Living and Dead*, by John Dix, 667, 668.
- Lisbon, Southey at, 103.
- Liston, John, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.
- — and Lubin Log in Kenney's farce, 322.
- — at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 374.
- — and Novello, 398, 399.
- — Lamb's mock biographical memoir of, 535.
- — dining with Lamb, 566.
- Literary Fund and Dyer, 152.
- Literary Gazette* and Procter's contributions to, 377.
- — and Lamb's *Album Verses*, 513, 514.
- — its attack on Lamb's *Album Verses*, 625, 626, 627.
- — and Southey and Leigh Hunt's indignation with, 626, 627.
- — and Tennyson's poems, 627.
- — and the *Last Essays of Elia*, 627.
- Little Queen Street, No. 7, Holborn, home of the Lamb family in 1794, 75.
- Lives of Eminent English Statesmen*, by John Forster, 674.
- Lives of the Necromancers*, by Godwin, 655.
- Lives of the Poets*, by Dr. Johnson, Lamb on, 182.
- — — — and Cary's continuation, 437.
- Livingston, Mr. Luther S., and John Lamb's pamphlet, 479.
- Lloyd, Charles, the elder, his translations from Homer and Horace, 139, 316.
- — the younger, on Mary Lamb, after the tragedy, 100.
- — living with Coleridge, 1796, 109.
- — — — living with Thomas Wilkinson, 1795, 109.
- — — — his first volume of poems, 109.
- — — — Coleridge's verses to, 109.
- — — — Coleridge's sonnet to (on the birth of Hartley Coleridge), 109.
- — — — his *Poems on the Death of Priscilla Farmer*, 110.
- — — — his wish to include Lamb's "The Grandame," 110.
- — — — his visit to Lamb, and Lamb's verses on, 113.
- — — — and the *Journal of John Woolman*, 113.
- — — — his illness, 115.
- — — — his indiscretions, 115.
- Lloyd, Charles, the younger, his breach with Coleridge, 1797, 115.
- — — — staying with Poole, 116.
- — — — leaves Coleridge, 116.
- — — — returns to Birmingham, 116.
- — — — visits Southey with Lamb, 121.
- — — — his engagement to Sophia Pemberton, 121.
- — — — contemplates a Scotch marriage, 121.
- — — — suffers under Coleridge's ridicule, 124.
- — — — and "The Old Familiar Faces," 129.
- — — — living with James White, 129.
- — — — his interest in *Rosamund Gray*, 129, 140.
- — — — his quarrel with Coleridge, 129, 130, 131.
- — — — betrays Coleridge's confidences in *Edmund Oliver*, 130, 131.
- — — — his letter of excuse to Cottle, 130.
- — — — passes out of the lives of Coleridge and Lamb, 134, 143.
- — — — his later years, 134.
- — — — describes Coleridge and Lamb in *Desultory Thoughts*, 135.
- — — — satirised in *The Anti-Jacobin*, 136.
- — — — and "Toad and Frog," 137.
- — — — his retort and defence of Lamb, 138.
- — — — satirised with Lamb in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 138.
- — — — his unsettling counsel to Robert Lloyd, 141.
- — — — his marriage, 174.
- — — — in lodgings at Cambridge, 175.
- — — — studying, with Manning's assistance, 175.
- — — — introduces Lamb to Manning, 175.
- — — — and Lamb in Westmorland, 228.
- — — — at Lamb's party, 1815, 355.
- — — — his translation of Alfieri, 355.
- — — — his rooms at Cambridge, 361.
- — — — and Lamb's Thursday evenings, 373.
- — — — in London, 1818, 375.
- — — — settled in London, 1819, 411.
- — — — and Macready, 411.
- — — — his *Nugæ Canoræ*, and Lamb's review of, 411.
- — — — introduces Macready to Lamb, 427.
- — — — his lines on Lamb, 431.
- — Grosvenor destroys Charles Lloyd's papers, 687.

- Lloyd, Priscilla, afterwards Mrs. Christopher Wordsworth, 139.  
 — — her illness, 169.  
 — — her counsel to Robert, 169.  
 — — and Lamb's congratulations on her engagement, 247.  
 — Robert, Charles Lloyd's letter to, on Lamb, 113.  
 — — Lamb first meets in London, 139.  
 — — his apprenticeship, 139.  
 — — Lamb's letters of counsel to, 141.  
 — — and his brother's recommendation of Rousseau, 141.  
 — — and *John Woodvil*, 142.  
 — — runs away and takes shelter with Lamb, 1799, 168.  
 — — his sister Priscilla's counsel, 169.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, September 13th, 1804, on nuptials, 247.  
 — — his marriage, 247.  
 — — his letters from London, 1809, 295.  
 — — on the Godwin household, 295.  
 — — on the Lambs' home life, 295.  
 — — his death, 1811, 313.  
 — — Lamb's memoir of, 313.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, 1809, on *Poetry for Children*, 477.  
 Locke, John, Ayrton's wish to see, Lamb on, 380, 381.  
 — — his "Essay on the Human Understanding," 380.  
 Lockhart, John Gibson, John Scott's quarrel with, 435.  
 Logan, John, quoted, 91, 114.  
 Lombardy and Pawnbroking, 68.  
 London, Lamb on the privacy of, 183.  
 — Lamb on the delights of, 188.  
 — Lamb's essay on, in the *Morning Post*, 189, 215.  
 — Lamb's love of, 229, 243, 344, 390, 432, 587, 588, 614, 615, 619, 620, 652, 662, 671, 674.  
 — its buildings of special interest to Lamb, 432.  
 — and Lamb's comparison with Paris, 489.  
 — Lamb's solitude in, 610.  
 — Lamb's last walk "London-wards," 674.  
*London Journal*, Leigh Hunt's, and his story of Martin Burney and Lamb, 235.  
 — — Leigh Hunt on Lamb in, 328, 329.  
*London Magazine* and Lamb's verses to Sheridan Knowles, 427.  
 — — its first publishers, 434, 436, 443.  
 — — its editor John Scott, 434, 435.  
 — — and Lamb, 434, 435, 436, 441, 442.  
*London Magazine* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, 435, 436.  
 — — its second publishers, 436, 437.  
 — — and Taylor and Hessey, 436, 437, 441, 442.  
 — — and Thomas Hood, 437.  
 — — its monthly dinners, 437.  
 — — its contributors, 437, 438, 440, 441.  
 — — its decline, 441, 442.  
 — — and "Olen's" poem to Lamb, 452, 453.  
 — — the editorship and Talfourd, 461.  
 — — and "The Old and the New Schoolmaster," 463.  
 — — and De Quincey's essay on "Macbeth," 469.  
 — — and "Dream Children," 483.  
 — — Lamb on its decline, 487.  
 — — and Taylor and Hood, 491.  
 — — and Bernard Barton's verses, 493, 494.  
 — — Lamb the hero of, 502.  
 — — and "Poor Relations," 505.  
 — — and the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 511.  
 — — Lamb loses interest in, 520.  
 — — Lamb working again for, 531.  
 — — and Miss Mitford on *Elia*, 532.  
 — — its price raised, 535.  
 — — and the "Confessions of H. F. V. Delamore, Esq.," 544.  
 — — and Lamb's verses to Hone, 551.  
 — — Lamb's last contribution to, 553.  
 — — and Lamb's sonnet "Leisure," 612.  
 "London Reminiscences," by De Quincey, Lamb described in, 252, 466, 467, 468, 469.  
 London Tavern, the dinner to Lamb at, 401, 402.  
 "Londoner, The," by Lamb, 189, 215.  
 Longmans, and the reprint of Coleridge's *Poems*, 239.  
 — publish Lamb's *Dramatic Specimens*, 289.  
 — and Southey's suggestion, 290.  
 — Edward Moxon with, 563, 564.  
 Lord Chief Justice, The, Lamb on, 499, footnote.  
 "Lord Mayor's State Bed," by Lamb, 215.  
 Lotteries, the Lambs' prize in, 262.  
 — Lamb's puffs for, 299.  
 — Lamb on success in, 531.  
 Louis XVII., Lamb on, 355.  
 "Louisa Manners," by Mary Lamb, quoted, 21.  
 Louvre, The, and Mary Lamb, 490.  
 "Love, Law and Physic," by James Kenney, 322.  
 "Love in the Alpuracas," by Thomas Westwood, and Landor, 592.



- Lovegrove, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.
- Lovel. See John Lamb.
- Lovell, Robert, and Coleridge and Southey, 84.
- Lovers' Seat, at Hastings, and Charles and Mary Lamb, 506.
- "Love's Labour's Lost" quoted by Coleridge, 280.
- — — quoted by Lamb, 281.
- — — Lamb on, 303.
- Love's Labour's not Lost*, by George Daniel, and Lamb, 516, 517, 518.
- Lucas, E. V., his edition of Lamb and Milton's portrait, 477.
- — — his edition of Lamb and Lamb's letter on Mary's caligraphy, 503.
- — — his conversation with Mrs. Coe, 571.
- — — his edition of Lamb's letters, 671, 672.
- — — his edition of Lamb, and the Lamb-Wordsworth letters, 675.
- — — and Mrs. FitzGerald's recollections of Mary Lamb, 687.
- Lucretia*, by Bulwer Lytton, and Wainwright, 440.
- "Lun's Ghost," 43.
- Lyceum Theatre, Lamb at, 309.
- — — Miss Kelly playing at, 414, 417.
- Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge's partnership in, 120.
- — — Lamb on, 142, 196, 197, 198.
- Lytton, Bulwer, his *Lucretia* and Wainwright, 440.
- — — his praise of Lamb, 673.
- M**
- Macaroons, Lamb's love for, 181.
- Macaulay, Lord, his memory, story of, 524.
- "Macbeth," Lamb on, 314, 469, 579, 580.
- De Quincey on, 469.
- Mackenzie, Henry, *Fulie de Roubigné*, its influence on *Rosamund Gray*, 140.
- Sir James, a brother-in-law of Daniel Stuart, 180.
- Mackery End, Lamb's first visit to, 20.
- — — in the present day, 23.
- "Mackery End" essay, 8, 20, 23, 259, 355, 356, 357.
- Mackintosh, Sir James, Lamb's epigram on, 200.
- — — his donation to Godwin's fund, 495.
- Maclise, Daniel, his portrait of Lamb, 670.
- Macmillan, Daniel, his letter to the Rev. S. Watt, 469.
- — — Thomas Hughes' memoir of, 469.
- Macmillan's Magazine* and Mr. William Foster on Lamb, 542.
- — — and John Chambers' recollections of Lamb, 543.
- Macready, W. C., Talfourd on his acting, and Lloyd, 411.
- — — introduced to Lamb by Lloyd, 411, 427.
- — — and Lamb's "Barbara S.," 411.
- — — and Lamb, 411.
- — — and Sheridan Knowles' "Virgilius," 427.
- — — Crabb Robinson on, 428.
- — — and Wainwright, 439.
- — — his meeting with Lamb, 1834, 660.
- — — and Lamb's wish for his "last breath," 660.
- Maginn, and Lamb's essay on Christ's Hospital, 436.
- a troublesome lodger to Miss James, 686.
- "Mahometan, The Young," by Mary Lamb, quoted, 25.
- Majocchi and Queen Caroline, and Lamb's joke on, 432.
- Malta, Coleridge in, 245-46, 274-76.
- Malvolio, Lamb on, 487.
- Man as he ought not to be, Lamb's preference for, 248.
- Mandariness, Lamb on, 294.
- Manning, Miss Anne, her *Family Pictures*, 70, 71.
- Mr. (of Exeter), meets the Lambs at Robinson's, 314.
- Thomas, his influence on Lamb, 174, 175.
- — — introduced to Lamb by Charles Lloyd, 1799, 175.
- — — his parentage and career, 175.
- — — described by Lamb, 175.
- — — a talker, 176.
- — — Lamb's early correspondence with, 176, 178, 183, 186, 187, 188, 189, 195.
- — — and *John Woodvil*, 195.
- — — Lamb to, on religion, 211.
- — — in Paris studying Chinese, 227.
- — — proposes to settle in Tartary, 237.
- — — Lamb's letter of dissuasion, 237.
- — — and Lamb's poem "Hester," 238.
- — — Lamb's letter to, in praise of brawn, 260.
- — — sails for China, 1806, 270.
- — — his affection for Charles and Mary, 270, 271.
- — — Lamb's letter to, about *Tales from Shakespear*, 271.

- Manning, Thomas, Lamb's regret in losing, 272.
- — Lamb's letter to, December 5th, 1806, 276.
- — and Mary Lamb's silk dress, 289.
- — Lamb's intimate friendship with, 330.
- — and Lamb on Fenwick and Fell, 339.
- — and Lamb's letter to, on Braham, 351.
- — his lodging at Cambridge, 361.
- — Lamb's nonsense letter to, December 25th, 1815, 362, 363.
- — Lamb's manner to, 376.
- — his return, 1817, Lamb on, 388.
- — his adventures in the East, 389.
- — his journal, 389.
- — and Napoleon, 389.
- — Barry Cornwall on, 389, 390.
- — his death, 1840, 390.
- — and Coleridge's metaphysicising, 399, 400.
- — Lamb's letter to, May 28th, 1819, about Tommy Bye, 411, 412.
- — and the great wall of China, 432.
- — his religion, Crabb Robinson on, 522.
- — his mysticism, Allsop on, 522.
- — Lamb's enthusiasm for, 528, 529.
- — Lamb's letter to, 1825, about leaving the India House, 535.
- — at Lamb's, 1825, 539.
- — and Lamb's dog Prynne, 570.
- — at Sir George Tuthill's, 1833, 648.
- — and Lamb's gift of *The Last Essays of Elia*, 648.
- — Lamb's last letter to, May 10th, 1834, 662.
- Mansfield, Lord, and Pope, Lamb on, 384.
- Mansion House, Lamb dining at, 519.
- "Many Friends," by Charles Lamb, and William Godwin the younger, 528.
- Maratti, Carlo, and John Lamb, Lamb on, 475.
- Marcian Colonna, by B. W. Procter, 377, 589.
- Margate, the Lambs at, 211, 464.
- "Maria Howe," by Charles Lamb, 14.
- Marlbro', in Wiltshire, Lamb at, 365.
- Marlowe, Christopher, commended by Lamb, 142.
- — Lamb on, 290, 386.
- — his "Rich Jew of Malta," Lamb on, 459.
- — his "Dr. Faustus" and Lamb, 651.
- Marshall, Godwin's friend, at the performance of "Antonio," 191, 192, 193, 194.
- — alienated by Mrs. Godwin, 230.
- Marshall sleeping through the "Ancient Mariner," 230.
- Marter, William, of the India House, Lamb's letter to, July 19th, 1824, 530.
- Martin, Louisa, Lamb on, 262, 263.
- — Lamb's appeal to Wordsworth for, 662.
- Marvell, Andrew, often quoted by Lamb, 223.
- — Lamb's praise of, 643.
- Mary of Buttermere*, Mary Lamb's account of, at Sadler's Wells, 241.
- Maseres, Baron, Lamb living near, 198.
- Massinger, Philip, his motto for Lamb's first poems, 107.
- Mathews, Charles, his meeting with Lamb, 464.
- — his theatrical portraits and his request to Lamb, 592, 593.
- — and Lamb's essay on the "Old Actors," 592.
- — Mrs., on Lamb and Mathews' meeting, 464.
- — half-sister of Fanny Kelly, 464.
- — her memoir of Mathews, 464.
- — and Lamb's perverseness, 477.
- — Lamb's liking for, 593.
- Matravis. See *Rosamund Gray*.
- May, the landlord of the Salutation Tavern, 88.
- "Maying" and "Must," Lamb's joke on, 353.
- "Meadows in Spring," by Edward Fitzgerald, and *The Athenæum's* mistake, 635.
- — Lamb's admiration of, 635.
- "Melancholy of Tailors, The," by Charles Lamb, 341, 342.
- Mellon, Miss Harriet, and Lamb's paragraph, 223.
- — — and Lamb's "Mr. H.," 223.
- Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson*, by George Dyer, 158.
- Men, Women and Books*, by Leigh Hunt, and Procter's breakfast with Dyer described in, 163.
- Merchant Taylors' School, Lamb on writing verses for the boys, 244.
- Meyer, Henry, his portrait of Lamb, 545, 562.
- — and the Society of British Artists, 562.
- Micawber, Wilkins, anticipated by certain of Lamb's friends, 203.
- Middleton, Thomas Fanshawe, and the Coleridge Memorial, 69.
- Mill, James, editor of *The Philanthropist*, 339.

- "Mille Viæ Mortis," Lamb's earliest poetical composition, 55.
- Milton, John, his house at York Street, Westminster, Hazlitt living there, 316, 317.
- his Devil, Lamb on, 365.
- discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.
- Lamb on his face, 381.
- the portrait of, and John Lamb, 477.
- — — given to Emma Isola, 477.
- — — now in America, 477.
- — — Lamb's invitation to Southey to see, 513.
- his "Samson Agonistes" and Mary Lamb, 568.
- and the Royalists, Lamb on, 639.
- Mirror of Literature, The*, memoir of Dyer in, 145.
- Misanthropists, Lamb's joke on, 342.
- "Mr. H.," Miss Harriet Mellon in, 223, 494.
- finished, 1806, 266.
- Mary Lamb not hopeful of, 267.
- accepted at Drury Lane, 272.
- Lamb on, 276.
- its performance, 1806, 276.
- Lamb on its failure, 276, 277.
- Hazlitt on, 277.
- its success in America, 278.
- Robinson repeats prologue of, to Flaxman, 315.
- — — — to Mrs. Barbauld, 323.
- and Lamb's *Works*, 406.
- "Mrs. Battle," 233, 460.
- Mrs. Leicester's School*, by Charles and Mary Lamb, 2, 14, 20, 21, 25, 39, 44, 283, 357.
- and Lamb's early years, 38.
- and Godwin, 179.
- and Mrs. Godwin, 212.
- published 1809, 292.
- Charles and Mary's respective shares in, 292.
- Landor's admiration of, 292, 683.
- and Crabb Robinson's present, 487.
- Mitford, John, and Lamb and the jars, 567.
- his description of Lamb at home, 567.
- Mary Russell, and Lamb, 529, 532.
- — Crabb Robinson on, 532.
- — on Lamb's praise of *Our Village*, 532.
- — her praise of *Elia*, 532.
- — at Colebrooke Cottage, 568.
- — and the Lambs, 1832, 643.
- Mitre Court Buildings, 16, Charles and Mary's home, 198.
- — — — Coleridge on Mary Lamb's illness there, 239.
- — — — the Lambs leave, 1809, 294.
- Mockshay, Mr., at Mary Lamb's funeral, 688.
- "Modern Gallantry" quoted, 72.
- "Modestia et Vanitas," Leonardo da Vinci's picture, Mary Lamb's verses on, 247, 558.
- Molière and Lamb's evenings, 387.
- Money, Lamb on, 298.
- Monkhouse, Thomas, 392.
- at Haydon's party, 392.
- at Lamb's evenings, 399.
- his literary dinner, 501, 502, 503.
- Crabb Robinson on the dinner, 501, 502.
- Moore on the dinner, 502.
- Lamb on the dinner, 503.
- his whisky, Lamb on, 504.
- in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- at Colebrooke Cottage, 522.
- his death, Lamb's regret for, 539, 540.
- "Monody on Chatterton," by S. T. Coleridge, 54.
- Montagu, Basil, and Wordsworth, 90.
- and Dyer's absent-mindedness, 159.
- and his friends, 272.
- his third marriage, 272.
- described by Fanny Kemble, 272, 273.
- Hazlitt's lecture at his house, 319.
- and Coleridge's visit to, 323.
- and Wordsworth's confidences, 323.
- his mischief-making, 323, 324.
- his *Some Enquiries into the Effects of Fermented Liquors*, and *Lamb's Confessions of a Drunkard* reprinted in, 331, 336.
- at Lamb's party, 1815, 355.
- Crabb Robinson on, 355.
- Wordsworth on, 355.
- at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 374.
- Mrs., the third wife of Basil Montagu, 272.
- Carlyle and Edward Irving friends of, 272.
- her daughter and grand-daughter, 272.
- described by Fanny Kemble, 273.
- at Greta Hall, 323.
- at Lamb's, 1817, 372.
- Hazlitt on her conversation, 380.
- at Coleridge's party, 528.
- Lamb's letter to, about the Clarkson memorial, 585.
- Lady Mary Wortley, and Pope, 385.



- Montaigne and Lamb's evenings, 387.
- Montgomery, James, and the chimney-sweeps, 526.
- — his release, Lamb on, 541.
- — his "Common Lot," Lamb's admiration for, 635, 671.
- Monthly Magazine*, Coleridge's Higginbottom sonnets in, 124.
- — and Dyer's *Poems*, 154.
- — published by Phillips, 207.
- *Repository* and S. Y.'s evening with Lamb and Coleridge, 355.
- Monthly Repository* and Leslie's record of Coleridge on Lamb, 668.
- *Review*, its attack on Lamb, 1830, 627, 628.
- Moore, Thomas, and the payment for *Elia*, 443.
- — and Kenney on Hazlitt's philosophy, 476.
- — and Mary Lamb's illness in France, 489, 502.
- — at Monkhouse's dinner-party, 501, 502.
- — on his meeting with Lamb, 502.
- — Crabb Robinson on, 502.
- — and Lamb's verses to Barry Cornwall, 1820, 502, footnote.
- — Lamb on his poetry, 670.
- More, Hannah, her book on education, 182.
- Morgan, John, at Lamb's, 307, 364, 367.
- — his misfortunes, 423.
- — Lamb and Southey's annuity to, 423, 424.
- — he enters the workhouse, 647.
- Mrs., and a letter from Mary Lamb to, 359.
- — with the Lambs at Brighton, 391.
- — Southey on, 423, 424.
- Morgans, The, Coleridge living with, 324, 345.
- — their home at 7 Portland Place, Hammersmith, 362.
- — the Lambs' visit to, 1816, 363.
- Morning Chronicle*, Coleridge's sonnets in, 79.
- *Post*, Coleridge a contributor to, 137.
- — Lamb's epigram on Canning and Frere, 138.
- — and Coleridge, 174.
- — Coleridge leader writer to, 178.
- — Coleridge leaves, 180.
- — its editor Daniel Stuart, 180, 214, 215, 221.
- — rejects Lamb's Imitations of Burton, 180.
- — Lamb a contributor to, 1801, 180.
- — and Lamb's longest connection with, 214, 215, 220, 221, 223.
- — changes proprietorship, 220.
- Morning Post* and Coleridge's suggestion to Lamb, 232.
- — and Coleridge's articles in, 275.
- Mountains, Lamb on, 227, 228, 229.
- — and the ham and beef shop, 229.
- Moving, Lamb on, 579, 587.
- Moxon, Edward, Southey's letter to, 1836, 84.
- — and Lamb's biography, Barron Field on, 357.
- — his *Englishman's Magazine*, 439.
- — and Lamb and Wainwright, 439.
- — his marriage with Emma Isola, 477.
- — introduced to Wordsworth by Lamb, 563.
- — Lamb on, 563, 564.
- — Mary Lamb's "Bodley," 564.
- — introduced to Rogers by Lamb, 564.
- — his poem "The Prospect," Lamb on, 564.
- — and Lamb's bet on Hood's child, 576.
- — and his parcels of books for the Lambs, 590.
- — Lamb's letter to, December 22nd, 1827, 594.
- — at Enfield, 1829, 609.
- — Lamb's letter to, September 22nd, 1829, 613.
- — his edition of Lamb's *Dramatic Specimens*, 624.
- — a publisher, financed by Rogers, 624.
- — publishes Lamb's *Album Verses*, 1830, 624.
- — Lamb's dedication to, 625.
- — his poem *Christmas* dedicated to Lamb, 625, footnote.
- — publishes Tennyson's poems, 627.
- — Lamb's letter to, November 12th, 1830, 631.
- — and "Satan in Search of a Wife," 631, 636.
- — his *Englishman's Magazine* and Lamb, 632, 635, 636.
- — Lamb's letter to, July 14th, 1831, 633.
- — and Lamb on his interrupted article, 636.
- — and the cash-embarrassment, 636.
- — Lamb's letter to, October, 1831, 636.
- — with Lamb and Christopher North, 643.
- — and the *Last Essays of Elia*, 647.
- — his lawsuit with Taylor, 647.
- — and Lamb and porter, 647.
- — and Lamb on the profits of *Elia*, 648.

- Moxon, Edward, Lamb's letter to, March 30th, 1832, 648.  
 — — a suitor for Emma Isola, 648.  
 — — his new premises in Dover Street, 648.  
 — — his sonnets on Miss Isola and on Lamb, 648, 649, 650.  
 — — his account of Lamb, 650, 651.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, April 25th, 1833, 652.  
 — — his engagement to Emma Isola, Lamb on, 652, 653.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, July 24th, 1833, 655.  
 — — his marriage to Emma Isola, 1833, Lamb on, 656.  
 — — Lamb's marriage verses to, 657.  
 — — his death, 1858, 657, footnote.  
 — — at Talfourd's supper-party and Lamb, 1834, 660.  
 — — and Lamb's last hours, 675.  
 — — his letter to Wordsworth, and Wordsworth's reply, November, 1835, 675.  
 — — Mary Lamb at his house, 684.  
 — — Emma. See Isola, Emma.  
 Moxons, The, Lamb's letter to, August, 1833, 656, 657.  
 — — Mary Lamb's letter to, August, 1833, 656, 657.  
 — — Lamb with, on his last birthday, 660.  
 Mozart, his "Don Giovanni" and Ayrton, 371, 374, 375.  
 Mulgrave, Lord, his friendship for Haydon, 317.  
 Mulready, William, his drawings to Lamb's *King and Queen of Hearts*, 256.  
 — — illustrates the *Tales from Shakespeare*, 282.  
 Munden, Joseph Shepherd, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.  
 — — — and Novello, 398, 399.  
 — — — Lamb's first meeting with, 420.  
 — — — and Lamb and Elliston, story of, 420.  
 — — — his retirement and Lamb, 526, 527.  
 — — — described in *Elia*, 526.  
 — — — Mary Lamb's pun on, 527.  
 — — — Lamb's "Autobiography" of, 535.  
 — — — his death, 1832, 642.  
 — — — and Lamb's final tribute to, 642.  
 Murray, John, Coleridge's poems recommended to, by Lord Byron, 364.  
 — — his donation to Godwin's fund, 495.  
 Murray, John, and Lamb's *Dramatic Specimens*, 624.  
 Music and Lamb, 397, 398, 514, 515, 629.  
 Mutton Lane, Lamb on, 243.  
 "My First Acquaintance with the Poets," by William Hazlitt, quoted, 118.  
 "My First Play," by Lamb, 9, 43, 325, 460.  
*My Friends and Acquaintances*, by P. G. Patmore, 250, 293, 523, 582.  
 — *Lifetime*, by John Hollingshead, and Mary Lamb at St. John's Wood, 685.  
 — *Long Life*, by Mrs. Cowden Clarke, 602.  
 "My Recollections of William Hazlitt," by J. B., 538, 539.  
 "My Relations," by Lamb, 11, 12, 460.  
 — — and John Lamb the younger, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 482.  
 Mylius, W. F., and the Lambs' *Poetry for Children*, 297.  
 Mystery in childhood, Lamb on, 43.
- N
- Naples, Coleridge at, 275.  
 Napoleon, his defeat, 374, 375.  
 — — and Manning, 389.  
 — — Lamb on, 458.  
 — — and Hazlitt, 458, 631.  
*Napoleon and other Poems*, by Bernard Barton, 494.  
*Napoleon, Life of*, by Hazlitt, 631.  
 Napoleon III., Orsini's attempt on the life of, 433.  
 National Portrait Gallery, Allston's portrait of Coleridge at, 405.  
*Necrology, The Annual*, George Dyer's contributions to, 144.  
 Nelson, Lord, Lamb on, 262.  
 Nether Stowey, Lamb meets Wordsworth at, 91.  
 — — the home of Coleridge, 115, 116.  
 — — Lamb's visit to, 1797, 116, 120.  
 — — Thelwall at, 137.  
*New Monthly Magazine* and Leigh Hunt, 285.  
 — — — and J. B. on Lamb, 538, 539.  
 — — — its publisher Colburn, 555.  
 — — — and Lamb's "Popular Fallacies," 555.  
 — — — Lamb giving up writing for, 564.  
 "New Morality, The," by George Canning, 136.  
 New River, and George Dyer, 160.  
 — — Lamb on, 514, 530.  
 — — Lamb warns his visitors against, 568.

- New South Wales and Barron Field, 357, 372.
- New Times, The*, and Mrs. Godwin, 212.
- — — and Lamb's review of Keats, 395.
- — — and Lamb's *Lepus* papers, 528, 536.
- "New Way to Pay Old Debts," by Philip Massinger, 363.
- "New Year's Eve," by Lamb, 38, 50, 62, 170, 451, 452, 460.
- New York Public Library and Lamb's portrait of Milton, 477.
- Newbery and children's books, 232.
- Newcastle, Margaret, Duchess of, Lamb on, 259, 387.
- Newgate and Fell, 265.
- Newspapers and Lamb, 180, 199, 214, 215, 216, 218, 219, 221, 223.
- "Newspapers Thirty-five Years Ago," 67, 199, 218, 219, 220.
- Newton, Sir Isaac, Ayrton's wish to see, Lamb on, 380, 381.
- — — Lamb and Keats on, 393.
- Norfolk Street, Coleridge at a chemist's in, 363, 364.
- Norris, Jane (afterwards Mrs. Tween), Mary Lamb's letter to, Christmas, 1841, 687.
- The Misses, daughters of Randal Norris, their school at Widford, 571, 572, 575.
- — — their marriage to the brothers Tween, 575.
- — — their relics of Lamb, 575.
- Randal, sub-treasurer of the Inner Temple, 205.
- — his death described by Lamb, 205, 206.
- — and the Temple, 206.
- — his death, Lamb on, 571.
- — his funeral, Lamb at, 576.
- Mrs. Randal, her grave at Widford, 36.
- — — a friend of Mrs. Field, 206.
- — — Mary Lamb her bridesmaid, 206.
- — — Mary Lamb's letter to, June, 1823, 505, 506.
- — — living at Widford, 571.
- — — described by Mrs. Coe, 572.
- — — Lamb and Crabb Robinson's efforts for, 576.
- — — and the Temple pension, 576.
- — — Lamb's visit to, 1833, 655.
- — — her death, 1843, 688.
- Richard, son of Randal Norris, at Widford, 571, 572.
- — and Lamb, 574.
- Mr., of Christ's Hospital, his kindness to the Lambs, 94, 97.
- North, Christopher. See Professor Wilson.
- Northampton, George Dyer at, 146, 148.
- Northcote, his talk, Hazlitt on, 380.
- Northcote, Conversations with*, by Hazlitt, 631.
- Norval, Young, and Lamb's delusion, 81, footnote.
- Notes and Queries*, Mr. James Elmer on Lamb and Haydon, 317.
- — — and Thomas Westwood's reminiscences of the Lambs, 588.
- — — and Mr. J. Fuller Russell's account of the Lambs, 672.
- Novello, Clara (now Countess Gigliucci), Lamb on her singing, 1834, 666.
- Mary Victoria. See Mrs. C. Cowden Clarke.
- Vincent, his musical evenings, 395.
- — his parentage and family, 396.
- — — and Lamb's *Tales from Shakespear*, 397.
- — — Lamb on, 397, 398.
- — — his dramatic idols, 398.
- — — his death, and memorial in Westminster Abbey, 398.
- — — and his son-in-law Cowden Clarke, 603.
- — — and Lamb's "Free Thoughts on Eminent Composers," 630.
- Mrs. Vincent, letter to, from Mary Lamb, 1820, 4.
- — — the loss of her little girl, and Mary Lamb's letter on, 425.
- Novellos, The, and the Lambs, 464.
- — Lamb on their "Conversion," 532.
- Novels, Lamb borrowing, 648.
- Nugæ Canoræ*, by Charles Lloyd, Lamb's review of, 411.
- Nyren, John, the cricketer, 399, footnote.

## O

- Observation, Lamb's extraordinary gift of, 78.
- "Ode on the Departing Year," by Coleridge, 556.
- Odes and Addresses*, by Hood and Reynolds, Lamb's review of, 550.
- Odyssey*, Chapman's translation of, and Lamb, 283, 286.
- Ogilvie, Mr., his stories of Lamb at the India House, 544, 545.
- O'Keeffe, Adelaide, and the *Original Poems*, 296.
- John, and "Mr. H.," 278.
- "Old Actors, The," by Lamb, 84, 592.
- "Old Benchers of the Inner Temple, The," 4, 7, 70, 169, 460, 465.



- "Old China," by Lamb, 171, 172, 173, 390, 484, 496, 648.
- "Old Familiar Faces," by Lamb, its popularity, 406.
- Old Man's Diary, An*, by J. P. Collier, 280, 643.
- "Old Margate Hoy, The," by Lamb, 496.
- Old Shakespeare Society, Barron Field edits Heywood for, 357.
- Ollier, Charles and James, publishers of Lamb's *Works*, 367, 405, 406.
- — — Lamb's letter to, 1818, 406.
- Edmund, his reminiscences of Lamb, 162.
- — his story of Dyer's absent-mindedness, 162.
- — — on Lamb "weathering a Mozartian storm," 398.
- "On the Conversation of Authors," by Hazlitt, 300, 378, 379, 380, 430.
- "On the Genius of Hogarth," by Lamb, Robinson and Flaxman on, 313.
- "On Great and Little Things," by Hazlitt, and the account of "Mr. H.," 277.
- "On the Look of a Gentleman," by Hazlitt, 149.
- "On Needlework," by Mary Lamb, quoted, 348.
- "On Shakespeare's Tragedies," by Lamb, 314.
- "One Dip," by Lamb, 507.
- Original Letters, etc., of Sir John Falstaff and His Friends*, by James White, 76.
- — — — Lamb's share in, 85.
- — — — Southey on, 85.
- — — — J. M. Gutch on, 85.
- Original Poems*, by Ann and Jane Taylor, and Adelaide O'Keefe, 296.
- Orsini, his attempt on Napoleon III., 433.
- Our Village*, by Mary Russell Mitford, Lamb's praise of, 532.
- Ovid, Lamb compared to, 300.
- Owen, Mrs., the Lambs' landlady at Great Russell Street, 390.
- Oxberry, his account of Miss Kelly's admirer, 416.
- Oxford, Rickman at, 187.
- and Burnett at, 207.
- Lamb's visits to, 184, 300.
- "Oxford in the Vacation," by Lamb, 144, 145, 158, 159, 418, 419, 428.
- P**
- Paice, Joseph, described by Lamb, 72.
- — and Lamb's East India House appointment, 76.
- Painters, Lamb's favourites, 268.
- Palmers, The, favourite actors of Lamb's, 78.
- Palmerston, Lord, and the War Office clerks, Lamb on, 487.
- Pamphleteer, The*, its proprietor William Evans, 350.
- — and Talfourd's "Essay on the Chief Living Poets," 351.
- Pancakes, Lamb on, 632.
- Pantisocracy, its devotees, 67.
- Coleridge's faith in, waning, 88.
- abandoned by Southey, 88.
- a cause of quarrel between Coleridge and Southey, 103.
- and George Burnett, 207.
- Pantomime, Lamb's share in one, 293.
- Paradise Lost*, by Milton, Lamb on, 379.
- — and Lamb and the minor poet, 524.
- *Regained*, by Milton, Lamb on, 378.
- Paris, Mrs., of Cambridge, Ayrton's sister, 237.
- — and the Lambs first meeting with Emma Isola, 237, 429.
- Manning in, 227.
- the Lambs in, 488, 489, 490.
- the boulevards, Mary Lamb on, 490.
- Paris Revisited in 1815*, by John Scott, 434.
- Parr, Dr., and Richard Farmer, 144.
- — and Lamb's power of smoking, story of, 240, 241.
- Parsons, Mrs. (Miss James's sister), Mary Lamb removed to her house, 1841, 685, 686.
- William, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.
- Pater, Walter, his *Appreciations*, 189, 448.
- — on Sir Thomas Browne, 189.
- — on Lamb and London, 189, 190.
- — his essay on Lamb, 329.
- — on *Elia*, 448, 449, 450.
- Patmore, Coventry, the poet, son of P. G. Patmore, 570.
- P. G., his *My Friends and Acquaintances*, 250, 523.
- — — on Lamb's friendship for Hazlitt, 250.
- — — on Lamb's pantomime MS., 293.
- — — on Lamb and L. E. L., 433.
- — — Scott's second at his duel, 435.
- — — and Lamb's French, 488.
- — — introduced to the Lambs by Hazlitt, 523.
- — — his *Rejected Articles* and the Lambs, 523.
- — — his description of Lamb, 524.
- — — on Wordsworth's poem and Lamb, 524.

- Patmore, P. G., his story of Lamb and the minor poet, 524.  
 — — — his account of Dash, 569.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, June, 1827, 570.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, July 19th, 1827, 582.  
 — — — on Becky, 609, 610, 611.  
 — — — on the Westwoods' extortions, 633.  
 — — — on Wordsworth's visit to Lamb at Enfield, 633.  
 — Mrs., Lamb's inquiries after, 570, 583.  
 "Pawnbroker's Daughter, The," by Lamb, 278, 553, 586.  
 Payne, John, his marriage to Sarah Burney, 461.  
 — and Foss, booksellers, Lamb's pun on, 529.  
 — John Howard, author of "Home, Sweet Home," 490.  
 — — — and Mary Lamb, 490.  
 — — — Crabb Robinson on, 490.  
 — — — Lamb's letters to, 490.  
 Peacock, Thomas Love, and Procter at Leigh Hunt's, 377.  
 — — — probably acquainted with Lamb, 377.  
 — — — his lines on the India House quoted, 377.  
 — — — story of Lamb and Peacock, 377, footnote.  
 Pearson, of Birmingham, publishes *Rosamund Gray*, 140.  
 Peirson, Peter, one of Lamb's bondsmen at the India House, 76.  
 Pemberton, Sophia, afterwards Mrs. Charles Lloyd, 121.  
*Pencilings by the Way*, 1835, by N. P. Willis, 663.  
 Penn, William, *No Cross, No Crown*, Lamb on, 113, 114.  
 Penshurst, the Lambs at, 505.  
 Pentonville. See Chapel Street and Islington.  
 Perceval, Mr., the assassination of, and Lamb and Coleridge, 324.  
 Perkin, Polly, of Widford, 37.  
 Perry, James, editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, 214, 331, 399.  
 — Kate, daughter of James Perry, her childish recollection of Lamb, 399.  
 — — and Mary Lamb at Mr. Bentley's cottage, 399.  
 "Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen," by Hazlitt, quoted, 380-88.  
 "Peter Bell," by Wordsworth, Lamb on, 410.  
 — — J. H. Reynolds' mock version of, 410.
- "Peter's Net" and Moxon's *Englishman's Magazine*, 635.  
 Petrarch and Chaucer, 382.  
 — Lamb on, 407.  
*Phantasmagoria*, by Sara Coleridge, 501.  
*Philanthropist, The*, Lamb's *Confessions of a Drunkard* appears in, 331.  
 — — its editors, William Allen and James Mill, 339.  
 Phillips, Ambrose, Lamb's liking for, 568.  
 — — at Winterslow, 298.  
 — Edward, his *Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum* and Lamb, 674.  
 — Erasmus, 385.  
 — Lieut.-Col. Molesworth, 236, 298, 373, 510, 515.  
 — Ned, 379.  
 — Sir Richard, of St. Paul's Churchyard, bookseller, and George Dyer, 151, 152.  
 — — — Burnett working for, 207, 208, 209.  
 — — — and poor authors, 209.  
 — — — and Lamb's Wednesday evenings, 293.  
 — — — his *Public Characters of all Nations* and Lamb, 496.  
 Philomel, and Lamb's comparison with, 486, 487.  
 Picquet and Mary Lamb, 461.  
 — and Charles and Mary playing, 657, 662.  
 — Mary playing, 1839, 685.  
 Pictures, Lamb on, 83, 268, 269, 310, 344.  
 — "The Raising of Lazarus," Lamb's admiration for, 268, 269.  
 — Lamb on the Stafford collection, 310.  
 — Lamb's preferences in, 344.  
 Pig, Lamb's praise of, 260, 485, 497, 498, 531.  
 — Lamb's "Gastronomic Vanity," 518.  
 — superseded by hare, 658.  
*Pilgrim's Progress, The*, Lamb's delight in, when a child, 9.  
 Pilpay, his *Fables*, Lamb on, 62.  
 Pimlico, Little James Street, 26, the home of Captain Burney, 233.  
 Piombo's picture of "The Raising of Lazarus" and Lamb, 268, 269.  
 Pitcairn, Dr., the Lambs' doctor, 93.  
 Pitchford, his puns, Lamb on, 310.  
 Pitt, William, criticised by Coleridge, 137.  
*Pisarro*, and the ten translations of, 182.  
*Plain Speaker, The*, by Hazlitt, 378.  
 Playhouse, Lamb's first visit to, 43.  
 "Playhouse Memoranda," by Lamb, quoted, 43.

- Plea of the Midsummer Fairies, The*, by Thomas Hood, dedicated to Lamb, 579.  
 — — — — and Lamb's paraphrase of, 579.  
 — — — — and Lamb's copy of, 589.  
 "Pleasures of Hating, The," by Hazlitt, and the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 521.  
*Plough, The*, edited by John Fenwick, 202.  
 Plumer, Jane, married Archbishop Whately, 37.  
 — William, Mrs. Field's first employer, 24.  
 — Mrs., widow of William Plumer, 24, 25.  
 — — described by Mary Lamb in "The Young Mahometan," 25.  
 Plumers, The, of Blakesware, employers of Mrs. Mary Field, 6, 23.  
 — — family history of, 24.
- Poems, by Lamb:—  
 Acrostic to Mrs. Williams, 621.  
 "Angel Help," 425, 629.  
 "The Ape," 263.  
 "Christ's Entry into Jerusalem," 318.  
 Dedicatory Sonnet to Martin Charles Burney, 235.  
 "The Dessert," 296.  
 Epigram on Mackintosh, 200.  
 "Epitaph on Mary Druiitt," 223.  
 "The Family Name," 1.  
 "Farewell to Tobacco," 261, 598.  
 "Free Thoughts on Some Eminent Composers," 629, 630.  
 "The Godlike," 426.  
 "Gone or Going," 36, 170.  
 "The Grandame," 35, 110, 480.  
 "The Gypsy's Malison," 606, 607.  
 "Hester," 238.  
 "In My Own Album," 586.  
 "Leisure," 612.  
 Lines on his father, 4.  
 Lines on his mother, 7.  
 Lines on his Aunt Hetty, 115.  
 Lines to Dibdin, 6.  
 Love sonnets, 81, 82.  
 "Mille Viæ Mortis," 54.  
 "The Old Familiar Faces," 128, 129.  
 "On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born," 577.  
 "Sister's Expostulation on the Brother's Learning Latin" and the "Brother's Reply," 49.  
 Sonnet to his sister, 89.  
 — — Gifford, 367, 406.  
 — — Miss Kelly, 412, 413.  
 — — Alderman Wood, 426.  
 — — "To John Lamb, Esq.," 470.
- Poems, by Lamb:—  
 Sonnet to Edith Southey, "Christian Names of Women," 648.  
 — — his sister, 661.  
 "To Sara and S. T. C.," 92.  
 "To Charles Lloyd, an Unexpected Visitor," 113.  
 "To Louisa M—— whom I used to call 'Monkey,'" 263.  
 "To T. L. H.," 330.  
 "To the Editor of the *Every-Day Book*," 551.  
 "To a Friend on His Marriage," 657.  
 "Thekla's Song," 181.  
 "The Three Graves," 469.  
 "The Triumph of the Whale," 321.  
 "Work," 493, 655.  
 "Written a Year after the Events," 121, 122.  
 "Written on Christmas Day, 1797," 126.  
 "Written at Cambridge, August 15th, 1819," 419.  
 "Written soon after the Preceding Poem," 122, 123.
- Poems copied by Lamb into Miss Isola's Extract-book, 605, 606.  
 Poems, Lamb's, a Paris edition of, 1829, 618.  
 — 1800, by George Dyer, 149, 150.  
 — — Lamb on the preface to, 150.  
 — — announcements of, in the *Monthly Magazine*, 1796, 1798, 1799, 154.  
 — — the first edition suppressed by Dyer, 155.  
 — (Dyer's), Lamb's copy of, 1801, with the cancelled preface, in the British Museum, 155.  
 — on the *Death of Priscilla Farmer*, by Charles Lloyd, 110.  
 — — — — Lamb's poem "The Grandame" included in, 110.  
 — on *Various Subjects*, 1796, by Coleridge, and Lamb's sonnets, 88.  
 — Coleridge's, Lamb's criticism of, 91.  
 — — 1797, Lamb's contributions to, 105, 106, 107.  
 — — Lamb's dedication to his sister in, 107.  
 — — Lamb only asks for two copies of, 116.  
 — — a projected third edition of, 129.  
 — — 1803, seen through the press by Lamb, 239.
- Poetical Pieces on Several Occasions*, by John Lamb, 5, 85.  
 — *Sketches*, by Wordsworth, 120.  
 — *Works*, Coleridge's note in, 1834, on Charles and Mary Lamb, 134, 667.



- Poetics*, 1812, by George Dyer, 145, 157, 165.
- Poetry for Children*, by Charles and Mary Lamb, 11, 38, 49, 283, 295, 296, 297, 477.
- Poet's Pilgrimage, The*, by J. P. Collier, 497, 498.
- Poland, George Burnett there, 207, 209.
- Political Justice*, by William Godwin, 179, 373.
- Pompey, Lamb's dog, 430, 570.
- Ponder's End, Lamb on, 486.
- Pontius Pilate, Lamb's wish to see, 379.
- Poole, John, his farce "Paul Pry" and Lamb's "Tom Pry," 490.
- and Lamb in Paris, 490.
- Thomas, letter from Coleridge, 50.
- Coleridge's letter to, September, 1796, 109.
- Lamb's visit to, 120.
- consulted by Coleridge, 245.
- and Coleridge with, 288.
- "Poor Gentleman, The," and Munden's retirement, 527.
- "Poor Relations," by Lamb, 3, 12, 67, 505.
- Pope, Alexander, 1.
- quoted by Lamb, 104.
- his "Epistle to Arbuthnot," 104, footnote.
- discussed by Miss Benger and Lamb, 182.
- his *Satires* and Lamb's pun, 341, footnote.
- discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.
- and Patty Blount, 383, 385.
- Lamb's admiration for, 384, 385.
- his "Epistles," Lamb reading, 384.
- his translation of Homer, Gay's verses on, 385.
- his "Rape of the Lock" among Lamb's books, 608, 609.
- Colley Cibber's pamphlets against, 609.
- "Poplars, The," the Lambs' house at Enfield Chase, Miss Vale on, 592.
- "Popular Fallacies," by Lamb, begun, 555.
- Porlock and Linton, Coleridge staying near, 130.
- Porson, Richard, a friend of Manning, 175.
- and John Rickman, 187.
- Porter, Anna Maria, author of *The Hungarian Brother*, 182.
- Jane, author of *The Scottish Chiefs*, 182.
- Porter and Lamb, 599, 643.
- Portsmouth, the Lambs meet Fenwick there, 242.
- Postlethwaite, Susannah, her marriage to Rickman, 262.
- Potter's Bar, and Lamb's pleasant walks to, 172.
- Powel, Mrs. (afterwards Mrs. Renard), a favourite actress of Lamb's, 78.
- "Praise of Chimney Sweepers, The," by Lamb, 484.
- Prayer, the Lord's, and Lamb, 575.
- Presents, Lamb on, 358, 359, 597.
- Press, The, or Literary Chit Chat*, 1822, on Lamb and Lloyd, 496, footnote.
- Priestley, Dr. Joseph, Lamb's admiration of, 90.
- — — his "On Philosophical Necessity," 90, 112.
- — — tabooed, 457.
- Primrose Hill and Lamb's joke against Dyer and others, 164.
- Prince Dorus*, by Charles Lamb, 298, 309, 310.
- Princes Street, Leicester Square, the home of the Bartrams, 83.
- Prior, Matthew, his "Down Hall," Lamb on praise of, 344.
- Procter, Adelaide Ann, grand-daughter of Mrs. Montagu, 272.
- B. W. (Barry Cornwall), his breakfast adventure with Dyer, 163.
- — — on Dyer's dog, 163.
- — — and Charles and Mary walking to Hoxton Asylum, 173.
- — — on Lamb and the ham and beef shop, 229.
- — — on Martin Burney, 234.
- — — on Lamb's Thursday evenings, 373, 375, 376.
- — — on Lamb's conversation and disposition, 376.
- — — his career, 377.
- — — his first meeting with Lamb, 377.
- — — his *Autobiographical Fragment*, 377.
- — — his *Dramatic Scenes*, Lamb on, 377.
- — — his *Marcian Colonna*, 377.
- — — his *Sicilian Story*, 377.
- — — his first meeting with Hazlitt, Coulson and T. L. Peacock, 377.
- — — on Manning, 389, 390.
- — — on Lamb's Russell Street rooms, 390.
- — — his description of Lamb, 408, 409.
- — — and Wainwright, 439.
- — — and the *London Magazine*, 441.
- — — and Lamb's varied manner, 458, 459.

- Procter, B. W., and Lamb and Scott, 495.  
 — — — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.  
 — — — executor of Lamb's will, 519.  
 — — — his marriage to Anne Skepper, 531.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, November 11th, 1824, 531.  
 — — — his rhymed address to Charles Lamb, 553.  
 — — — his annoyance at Brook Pulham's caricature of Lamb, 563.  
 — — — Leigh Hunt's letter to, July, 1826, 564.  
 — — — Lamb's opinion of, 568.  
 — — — on Lamb's good things, 573.  
 — — — Lamb's jesting mention of, 584.  
 — — — at Enfield, 1828, 596.  
 — — — on Charles and Mary at home, 602.  
 — — — his description of Mary, 602.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, December, 1828, 603.  
 — — — and the American Second Series of *Elia*, 603.  
 — — — and Emma Isola's Album, 604.  
 — — — Lamb's letter to, January 22nd, 1829, 606.  
 — — — and Lamb's first will, 631.  
 — — — his Memoir of Lamb, Carlyle on, 641.  
 — — — his *Autobiographical Fragment* and Lamb, 647.  
 — — — at Talfourd's last dinner-party to Lamb, 674.  
 — — — and Lamb's last hours, 675.  
 — — — and Lamb's will, 682.  
 — — — his visit to Mary Lamb at Edmonton, 1841, 685.  
 — — — on the Waldens and Mary Lamb's kindness, 685.  
 — — — his letter to Talfourd, June, 1841, 685.  
 — Mrs. B. W., mentioned as A. S. in "Oxford in the Vacation," 159.  
 — — — daughter of Mrs. Montagu, 272.  
 — — — on Lamb's alcoholic excess, 623.  
 — — — her letter to Mr. Dykes Campbell, 623.  
 — — — her destruction of Lamb's letters, 687.  
 "Progress of Infidelity, The," by Southey, and *Elia*, 508.  
 "Progress of Vice," by S. T. Coleridge, 54.  
*Prospect, The, and other Poems*, by Edward Moxon, 564.  
 Prynne, Lamb's dog, and Manning, 570.  
*Public Characters of all Nations*, by Sir Richard Phillips, and Lamb, 496.  
 Publican, the lady marrying a, and Lamb, 456.  
 Puckeridge, in Hertfordshire, Lamb's property near, 325.  
 Pulham, Brook, his caricature of Elia, 544, 562, 563, 692.  
 — — and Lamb's copy of Wither, 544.  
 — — his record of Lamb in the stocks, 544.  
 Puns, Lamb's, in *The Albion*, 200.  
 — Captain Burney's in the Otaheité language, 233.  
 — Hazlitt on, 309.  
 — Lamb's, Crabb Robinson on, 310.  
 See also Jokes.  
 Pye, the Poet-Laureate, his daughter married to Arnold, 236.  
 Pypos. See Derwent Coleridge.
- Q
- "Quæ nocent docent," by S. T. Coleridge, 54.  
 Quakerism and Lamb, 113, 114.  
 — the Quaker plainness of Lamb's dress, 114.  
 Quakers and writing poetry, Lamb on, 493.  
 "Quakers' Meeting, A," by Lamb, 113, 114.  
 Quarles, Francis, Lamb on, 142.  
*Quarterly Review*, Gifford's attack on Lamb in, 319, 405, 513.  
 — — and Lamb's *Confessions of a Drunkard*, 336.  
 — — and Lamb's rejoinder, 336.  
 — — and Lamb's review of *The Excursion*, 345, 513.  
 — — and Southey, 405.  
 — — and Clare's poems, 440.  
 — — and Southey's attack on *Elia*, 508, 513.  
 — — and Tennyson's poems, 671.  
 — — and its attacks on Lamb, 688.  
 Queen Caroline, Lamb's feeling for, 426, 427.  
 — — and Majocchi, Lamb's joke on, 432.  
 Queen's Head, Islington, Lamb at, 518.  
 Quillinan, Edward, and Emma Isola, 616.  
 Quixote, Don, and Elia, 673.
- R
- Rabelais and Lamb's evenings, 387.  
 — and John Lamb, 481.  
 Racedown, Wordsworth and his sister there, 90.

- Rambler, The*, by Dr. Johnson, discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.
- Rameau and Nephew*, by Diderot, translated by Crabb Robinson, 309, 310.
- — — Lamb's opinion of, 309.
- Raphael, his "Planets" and Lamb, 460.
- his "Bible" and Lamb and Hazlitt, 460, 461.
- and John Lamb, Lamb on, 474.
- Raymond, George, his *Memoirs of Elliston*, 420.
- his story of Lamb, Elliston and Munden, 420.
- Reading, Charles and Mary's different tastes in, 259.
- Recollections*, by Joseph Cottle, 88.
- "Recollections of Christ's Hospital," by Lamb, 61, 326.
- "Recollections of a Late Royal Academician," by Lamb, 635.
- Recollections of Writers*, by the Cowden Clarkes, Dyer described in, 164.
- — — and Lamb among children, 398.
- — — and the Lambs at Margate, 464.
- — — and the Lambs at Enfield, 596.
- Red stockings, Lamb's jokes on, 218, 221, 222.
- Redgauntlet*, by Sir Walter Scott, 614.
- Reflector, The* (Leigh Hunt's), Lamb's essays in, 298.
- — Lamb's contributions to, 303, 304, 316.
- — its brief career, 304, 337.
- — and Lamb's Hogarth, 313.
- — and Lamb's essay on Shakespeare's Tragedies, 314, 320.
- — and Lamb's work in, 357.
- — Barron Field a contributor to, 357.
- — Lamb's work in, and Gifford and Murray, 367.
- — and Lamb's *Works*, 406.
- — (Moxon's), its editor John Forster, 647.
- — and Lamb's essay on the "Barrenness of Imagination," 647.
- Rejected Addresses*, Lamb's address not noticed by the authors of, 326.
- — and Patmore's *Rejected Articles*, 523.
- — *Articles*, by P. G. Patmore, published by Colburn, 523.
- — and the Lambs, 523.
- — Lamb on, 592.
- "Rejected Epigrams," in *The Examiner*, 1830, Lamb's probable contributions to, 626, 627.
- "Rejoicings on the New Year's Coming of Age," by Lamb, anticipated by Lamb's fable for "Twelfth Night," 215.
- Religion and Lamb, 210, 211, 388.
- and Manning, 522.
- "Religious Musings," by S. T. Coleridge, 79, 80, 89.
- Reminiscences of Cambridge*, by Henry Gunning, 63, 429.
- "Remorse," by S. T. Coleridge, produced at Drury Lane, 326.
- Lamb's prologue to, 326.
- and Mrs. Jordan's voice, 558, 559.
- Restraint, Lamb on, 440.
- Reviewers and hostility to Lamb, 628. See also *Quarterly Review*.
- Revue des Deux Mondes* and Philarète Charles' account of Lamb, 407.
- Reynard the Fox*, Goethe's, and Robinson's suggestion to Lamb, 309.
- Reynolds, Frederick, and Lamb, 566.
- — on Godwin's "Antonio," 192.
- John Hamilton, his mock "Peter Bell," 410.
- — — and the *London Magazine*, 441.
- — — and Hood and Keats, 441.
- — — his pseudonym, Edward Herbert, 441.
- — — his and Hood's *Odes and Addresses* reviewed by Lamb, 550.
- Sir Joshua, 1.
- Mrs., Lamb's schoolmistress, 38, 39.
- — probably "Betsy Chambers," 38.
- — her acquaintance with Goldsmith, 39.
- — pensioned by Lamb, 39.
- — described by Hood, 39.
- — and Mary Lamb's confidence to, 293.
- — at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 380, 383, 385.
- — and Goldsmith, 383.
- — her wish to see Pope, and Patty Blount, 383, 385.
- — her death, Lamb on, 647.
- Rich, William, and "Lun's Ghost," 43.
- "Richard II.," Lamb on, 314.
- — Kean in, 355.
- — Lamb's prologue to amateur performance of, 358.
- "Richard III.," Lamb on, 314.
- Richards, George, a schoolfellow of Lamb's, 69.
- Richardson, of the India House, refuses Lamb a holiday, 92.
- Samuel, 1.
- — Lamb on, 385.
- Riches, Lamb on, 493.
- Richmond, Lamb's unknown misdemeanour at, 1801, 210.
- Dyer and Lord Buchan at, 224.
- Charles and Mary's holiday at, 247.
- Mary Lamb with Mrs. Burney at, 312.



- Richter, Jean Paul, Crabb Robinson's translations from, 310.
- Rickman, John, introduced to Lamb by George Dyer, 151, 186.
- — living in Southampton Buildings, 187.
- — his parentage and career, 187.
- — in Dublin with Abbot, 188, 214.
- — his service to Southey, 188, 214.
- — described by Southey, 188.
- — his kindness to Burnett, 209.
- — his opinion of *John Woodvil*, 214.
- — Lamb's letters to, 215, 216, 224, 249, 466.
- — his offer concerning *John Woodvil*, 224.
- — Mary Lamb's meeting with Mr. Babb at his house, 239.
- — and his sister with the Lambs at Sadler's Wells, 241.
- — Lamb and Captain Burney's joint letter to, 243.
- — and Coleridge, 246.
- — his marriage, 262.
- — and Lamb's request for Fell, 265.
- — and Lamb's Wednesday evenings, 293.
- — at Lamb's, 307.
- — his smoking, 339.
- — and Chatterton's forgeries, 341.
- — and Tom Holcroft, 420.
- — and Martin Burney, 466.
- — at Lamb's evenings, 515.
- — and Southey at his house, 1830, 631.
- Mrs., her baby's death, Mary Lamb on, 303.
- — and Mary Lamb, 466.
- Miss, with the Lambs at Sadler's Wells, 241.
- Thomas Clio, his epitaph, Lamb quoting, 502.
- Ritchie at Haydon's party, 392, 393.
- and Keats' *Endymion*, 395.
- his death, 395.
- "Road to Ruin," by Holcroft, 230.
- "Rob Roy," Macready's acting in, 411.
- Robinson, Anthony, the Unitarian, a friend of Crabb Robinson's, 324.
- — entertains the Lambs, 324.
- — and Lamb's enjoyment at his house, 341, 344.
- — living at Enfield, 343.
- — entertains Lamb and Crabb Robinson, 343.
- — and Crabb Robinson, 536.
- — his death, 576.
- — Mrs., 341.
- Henry Crabb, on C. V. Le Grice, 64.
- — and Dyer's refusal of Lord Stanhope's legacy, 164.
- Robinson, Henry Crabb, reads to Dyer, 167.
- — — Lamb's letter to, on Randal Norris's death, 205, 206.
- — — his story of Lamb's limits in hating, 250.
- — — at the performance of "Mr. H.," 1806, 276.
- — — introduced to the Lambs by Mrs. Clarkson, 1806, 279.
- — — on the Lambs' home and friends, 279.
- — — his career, 280.
- — — Lamb on his first brief, 280, 362.
- — — introduces the Colliers to Lamb, 280.
- — — introduced by Lamb to Wordsworth, 1808, 289.
- — — Dorothy Wordsworth's letter to, November 6th, 1810, 301.
- — — and Lamb on Shakespeare, 303.
- — — begins his *Diary*, 1811, 305.
- — — and George Burnett, 306.
- — — on George Dawe, 307.
- — — on Mary Lamb's illness, 1811, 308.
- — — his translations, 309, 310.
- — — and William Blake, 311.
- — — and "poor Coleridge," 311.
- — — on Shakespeare, 314.
- — — and the Godwins, 314, 315.
- — — his turkey-gifts, 315.
- — — and Lamb's "Mr. H.," 315, 323.
- — — on Hazlitt's lectures, 316, 318, 319.
- — — on Barnes, 319.
- — — on Leigh Hunt, 321.
- — — on the Kennneys, 322.
- — — reconciles Coleridge and Wordsworth, 324.
- — — and Wordsworth's "Peter Bell," 324, 325.
- — — on Hazlitt, 330.
- — — on Lamb's *Confessions of a Drunkard*, 331.
- — — his admiration for Charles and Mary, 342.
- — — the Lambs' visit to the Aikins, 342.
- — — his walk with Lamb, 1814, 343, 344.
- — — Lamb on, 345.
- — — on Miss Hutchinson, 354, 355.
- — — and Mrs. Wordsworth, 355.
- — — on Basil Montagu, 355.
- — — Barron Field's letter to, February 16th, 1835, 357.
- — — his dislike of John Lamb, 362, 362, 431, 476.

- Robinson, Henry Crabb, his present to Mary Lamb, 364.
- — — on Lamb's delight, 364.
- — — and Hazlitt's attack on Coleridge, 366, 367.
- — — and Lamb's jokes, 369.
- — — Lamb's gift to, 1816, 369.
- — — his present to Lamb, 1816, 369.
- — — cuts Hazlitt, 1816, 370.
- — — and Lamb's apology for Hazlitt, 372.
- — — and Southey's poems, 372.
- — — and Lamb's Thursday evenings, 373.
- — — his leisure achieved, 375.
- — — and Hazlitt's quarrel with Lamb, 388.
- — — and Lamb, 392, 399.
- — — and Mary Lamb, 392, 400.
- — — on Lamb's evening party, 399, 400.
- — — on Leigh Hunt and on Talfourd, 404.
- — — on Lamb's kindness to visitors, 411.
- — — and Tom Holcroft, 420, 421, 425, 426.
- — — and Hazlitt, 424, 426.
- — — and Leigh Hunt, 426.
- — — on Wordsworth, 427, 428.
- — — on Macready, 428.
- — — on Miss Kelly, 430.
- — — on Lamb's "natural piety," 453, footnote, 522.
- — — and Flaxman and "New Year's Eve," 460.
- — — and the Lambs and Mrs. Barbauld's meeting, 1821, 464.
- — — on Hazlitt and his child, 465.
- — — Miss Wordsworth's letter to, November 24th, 1821, 465.
- — — and John Lamb, 476, 477, 478.
- — — and John Lamb's death, 477.
- — — and John Lamb's book, 478.
- — — and *Mrs. Leicester's School*, 487.
- — — and the Lambs' visit to France 1822, 487.
- — — with Mary Lamb in Paris, 489, 490.
- — — his waistcoat and Mary Lamb, 490, 491.
- — — on Godwin's lawsuits, 494.
- — — his assistance to Godwin, 494, 495.
- — — on Monkhouse's dinner-party, 501, 502.
- — — and on Coleridge's talk, 502.
- — — on Lamb and Moore, 502.
- — — Moore on, 502.
- Robinson, Henry Crabb, on "Poor Relations," 505.
- — — and Mary Lamb and German, 505.
- — — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510, 511, 512.
- — — on Lamb on Leigh Hunt and on Hazlitt, 511, 512.
- — — on Lamb's library, 521.
- — — and Hazlitt, 521.
- — — and Mary Lamb and confidences, 522.
- — — and Blake, 526.
- — — and Lamb and Mrs. Barbauld, 527.
- — — his dislike of the Godwins, 528.
- — — on Coleridge's party, 528.
- — — on Henry Taylor, 528.
- — — on Coleridge and Irving, 528.
- — — on Lamb's enthusiasm for Manning, 528, 529.
- — — and Lamb, 532, 536, 549, 550, 555.
- — — and Mary Lamb, 536, 549, 550.
- — — on Lamb's "life" of Liston, 536.
- — — on the Lambs' importunate callers, 536.
- — — on Ainsworth, 536.
- — — his regret for Monkhouse, 539.
- — — Lamb's note to, March 29th, 1825, on leaving the India House, 540.
- — — on Charles' delight in his freedom, 549.
- — — on Sheridan Knowles, 549.
- — — on Lamb's illness, 1825, 549, 550.
- — — on Charles and Mary's illnesses, 1825, 555.
- — — on Meyer's portrait of Lamb, 1826, 562.
- — — his efforts with Lamb for Mrs. Norris, 1827, 576.
- — — and Lamb and Allsop, 576.
- — — on Lamb at Enfield, 1827, 593, 594.
- — — on Miss Kelly, 595.
- — — Lamb staying with, 1828, 595, 596.
- — — on Lamb's "The Wife's Trial," 603.
- — — Lamb's mischievous letter to, April, 1829, on his illness, 607.
- — — visiting the Lambs at Enfield, 1829, 607.
- — — and Lamb's library, 608, 609.
- — — on Becky's departure, 609.
- — — in Rome, 1829, 613.

- Robinson, Henry Crabb, Lamb on his foreign tour, 616.
- — — Mrs. Aders' letter to, September 5th, 1830, 629.
- — — Lamb's affection for, 629.
- — — his return, and his visit to the Lambs, 1831, 637, 638.
- — — on the Westwoods, 637, 638.
- — — Lamb's visits to, in 1832, 642, 643.
- — — on Lamb on Miss Isola, 644.
- — — and Landor and Lamb, 644, 645.
- — — and Landor's verses, 646.
- — — and Lamb's Album, 651.
- — — and Lamb on writing acrostics, etc., 651.
- — — and Lamb on Goethe's and Marlowe's "Faust," 652.
- — — on Tennyson's poems, 652.
- — — Wordsworth's letter to, November, 1833, 658.
- — — on the Lambs' health, 1833, 658.
- — — on Lamb's visit and his sad condition, 662.
- — — asks Lamb and Samuel Warren to breakfast, 662.
- — — his visit to the Lambs, 1833, 662, 663.
- — — and Willis the Yankee, 663.
- — — his breakfast to Willis and the Lambs, 663, 664, 665.
- — — and Mary Lamb at Charles' death, 675.
- — — his offer of pecuniary help, 682.
- — — Talfourd's letters to, 1835, 682, 684.
- — — his visits to Mary Lamb, 682, 683, 685, 688.
- — — and Landor's letter to, 1835, 683.
- — — and Mary Lamb at the Moxons, 684.
- — — and Mary Lamb in 1843, 688.
- — — at Mary Lamb's funeral, 688.
- Rev. Robert, of Cambridge, story of, and Dr. Ryland, 147.
- — — George Dyer a tutor to his children, 148.
- — — his life written by Dyer, 148.
- Thomas (Crabb Robinson's brother), Crabb Robinson's letter to, March 14th, 1811, 308.
- — Crabb Robinson's letter to, May 29th, 1847, 688.
- Rochester, Mary Lamb nursed at a cottage near, 399.
- Rogers, Henry, brother of Samuel Rogers, Lamb at his rooms, 255.
- Rogers, Samuel, at Monkhouse's dinner-party, 501, 502, 503.
- — and Lamb and Moxon, 564.
- — Moxon dedicates his poems to, 564.
- — his generosity to Moxon, 624.
- — Lamb on, 625, footnote.
- — his *Italy* and his *Poems*, Moxon's editions of, 625, footnote.
- — and Coleridge's pension, 634, 635.
- — Lamb's letter to, December, 1833, 658, 659.
- — his gift to Lamb of his poems, 659.
- — Lamb's sonnet to, 659.
- Rogue, The; or, The Adventures of Don Guzman D'Alfarache*, 686.
- Rome, Coleridge at, 275.
- "Romeo and Juliet," Coleridge's lecture on, 313, 314.
- Rookwood*, by Harrison Ainsworth, 536.
- "Rosalind and Helen," by Shelley, Lamb's liking for, 395.
- Rosamund Gray*, by Lamb, 3, 31, 37, 109, 120, 129, 139, 140, 180, 396, 406, 607.
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques, his *Emilius* and Charles Lloyd, 141.
- — and Lamb's evenings, 387.
- Royal Geographical Society and Manning's journal, 389.
- Institution and Coleridge's lectures, 288.
- — Hazlitt's first lecture at, 316.
- Russell, Mr. Fuller, and Lamb, 225, 669.
- — — on his visits to the Lambs at Edmonton, 669, 670, 671.
- — — and the Lambs and his poem, 670, 672.
- — — on Lamb's ways with Mary, 670.
- — — on Mary Lamb, 670.
- — — on Lamb's appearance, 670.
- — — on Lamb's voice and reading, 670.
- — — on Lamb on contemporary poets, 670, 671.
- — — and Lamb on his library, 671.
- — — and Lamb on "Satan," 671.
- Rutt, Miss Anne, meets Lamb at Talfourd's, 595.
- Rye House pleasure gardens, 36, 83.
- Ryland, Rev. Dr., of Northampton, George Dyer at his academy, 146.
- — — story of, and the Rev. Robert Robinson, 147.
- Ryle, of the India House, executor of Lamb's first will, 519.
- co-trustee in Lamb's second will, 631.
- and the death of Charles Lamb, 674.
- at Mary Lamb's funeral, 688.



## S

- Sadler, Thomas, editor of Crabb Robinson's *Diary*, 305.
- Sadler's Wells, Mary Lamb's account of, 241.
- Saffron Walden, Robert Lloyd at, 139.
- "Sailor, The," by George Dyer, quoted, 156.
- "Sailor Uncle, The," by Mary Lamb, 212, 292.
- "St. Agnes' Eve," by Keats, Lamb's review of, 395.
- St. Anne's, Soho, Hazlitt buried there, 631.
- St. Dunstan's Church and Lamb and the removal of the old clock, 650.
- St. James's, Clerkenwell, the burial-place of Sarah Lamb, 114.
- — — John Lamb the elder buried there, 170.
- St. John Street and Lamb's Quaker meeting, 113.
- St. Leon*, by William Godwin, 179.
- Salisbury, Sarah Stoddart's mother at, 262.
- Lamb's joke on the cathedral spire, 299.
- Salt, Samuel, employer of John Lamb, 4.
- — Lamb's description of, 7, 8.
- — his influence at the South-Sea House, Christ's Hospital and the India House, 8.
- — his library, 8.
- — and the Lambs, 11.
- — Lamb's probable sponsor at Christ's Hospital, 46, 49, 72.
- — his death, and his bequests to the Lambs, 74.
- — and Lamb's East India House appointment, 76.
- — and John Lamb at the South-Sea House, 471.
- Salutation Tavern, Lamb and Coleridge at, 79, 80.
- — Coleridge's bill there paid by Lamb, 88.
- Salvator Rosa and Lamb, 269.
- Sargus, Mr., Lamb's tenant at Button Snap, 325.
- Satan in Search of a Wife*, written by Lamb in 1830, 631.
- — — — issued anonymously by Moxon, 631.
- — — — and the profits on, 636.
- — — — Lamb on its not selling, 665.
- — — — and Lamb on suppressing it, 671.
- Satchell, Thomas, and the *Bibliotheca Piscatoria*, 590, 591.
- "Saturday Night," by Lamb, quoted, 28.
- Savory, Hester, her appearance, 83.
- — Lamb's poem on, 238.
- — living at Fentonville, 239.
- — her death, 1803, 239.
- — and Lamb's joke on the Witch of End-door, 643.
- "Scorners, The," by Wordsworth, 404.
- Scotchmen, Lamb on, 455, 639.
- Scott, John, with Lamb and Haydon, 318.
- — editor of *The Champion*, 342.
- — editor of the *London Magazine*, 342.
- — and the *London Magazine* and Lamb, 434, 435.
- — his books of travel, 434.
- — Talfour on, 434.
- — and *Blackwood's Magazine*, 435.
- — his duel, 435.
- — his death, 435, 461.
- Sir Walter, his trait in common with Lamb, 270.
- — — and Lamb's appeal for Godwin, 494, 495.
- — — Lamb's letters to, 1822, 494, 495.
- — — his invitation to Lamb, 495.
- — — meets Charles Lamb, 495.
- — — the Waverley Novels and Lamb, 495.
- — — his walking, Cunningham on, 580.
- — — his "Lay," Lamb on, 671.
- — — and Elia, 673.
- Scribner's Magazine* and Mr. Ogilvie's reminiscences of Lamb, 544.
- "Sea Voyage, The," by Charles Lamb, 212, 292.
- Seamanship, Lamb's specimen of, 242.
- Secrecy*, by Mrs. Fenwick, 201.
- Secrecy*, Mary Lamb on, 243.
- Seine, The, Lamb on, 489.
- Select British Poets*, by Hazlitt, and Lamb and Mary Lamb, 521, 522.
- Seward, Miss Anna, on Pope, 182.
- Shakespeare and Lamb's reading, 198.
- Captain Burney on, 234.
- and Lamb's comparison of, with Titian, 268.
- and Mary Lamb's opinion of, 273.
- Lamb on his plays, 282, 303.
- Lamb on the "Beauties" of, 286.
- Lamb on the tragedies of, 304.
- his anachronism, Lamb's joke on, 306.
- discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378, 381, 386.
- Lamb on his portraits, 381.
- Lamb on meeting him, 388.
- Coleridge's lectures on, 307, 401.
- and Lamb's affinity with, 445.

- Shakespeare, John Lamb quoting, 481.  
 — and the "Bellows" portrait, 488.  
 — his portrait at Canonbury Tower and Lamb, 517, 518.  
 Sharpe, Sutton, and Crabb Robinson, 511.  
 — "Conversational," his *Essays*, Lamb on, 670, 671.  
 Sheep-stealing, Lamb on, 606.  
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, and Peacock, 377.  
 — — — Lamb's antipathy to, 378, 395.  
 — — — described by Mrs. Cowden Clarke, 395.  
 — — — his "Rosalind and Helen," Lamb's liking for, 395.  
 — — — his admiration for Lamb, 395, 396.  
 — — — and *Rosamund Gray*, 396.  
 — — — his death and Lamb, 396.  
 — — — Hunt's letter to, April 24th, 1818, 406.  
 — Mrs. (Mary Godwin), and Lamb, 396.  
 — — her *Frankenstein*, Lamb's admiration of, 396.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, July 26th, 1827, 418, 427.  
 Shenstone, William, his "Schoolmistress," and Cary, 437.  
 Sheridan, Richard Brinsley, 1, 9, 10.  
 — — — and Lamb in pantomime work, 293.  
 — Tom, collaborating with Lamb, 293.  
*Sicilian Story, A*, by B. W. Procter, 377.  
 Sicily, Coleridge in, 275.  
 Siddons, Mrs., Mrs. Lamb's stated resemblance to, 6.  
 — — sonnet to, by Coleridge and Lamb, 79.  
 — — compared with Braham's singing, 287.  
 — — and Robert Lloyd, 295.  
*Sidelights on Charles Lamb*, by Bertram Dobell, and S. Y.'s evening with Lamb and Coleridge, 556.  
 Sidney, Sir Philip, and Lamb, 379, 381.  
 Simmons, Ann, of Blenheims, near Blakesware, probably Alice W——, 75.  
 — — the Anna of Lamb's sonnets, 80.  
 — — and her marriage to Mr. Bartram, 83.  
 — — in widowhood, 83.  
*Sintram and His Companions*, by Fouqué, lent to Crabb Robinson by Lamb, 430.  
 Skepper, Anne, at Greta Hall, 323.  
 — — her marriage to Procter, 531.  
 Skiddaw described by Lamb, 228, 229.  
 Skinner Street, 41, Mrs. Godwin's bookshop at, 292.  
 Smith, Mr. Dolphin, present owner of Mackery End, 23.  
 — Mr., and Lamb's "beauty," 306.  
 — — and "Imperfect Sympathies," 306.  
 Smith, Mr., at Hazlitt's, 309.  
 — Mrs., and the Lambs at Cambridge, 428.  
 — — portrayed in "The Gentle Giant-ess," 428.  
 — — Charlotte, and Mrs. Godwin, 272.  
 Smoking. See Tobacco.  
 Smollett, Tobias, 1.  
 — — at what age to read, 141.  
 — — discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378, 379.  
 Smooth, Ephraim (in "Wild Oats"), quoted by Lamb, 525.  
 Snow, Lamb on, 632, 633.  
 Snuff and tobacco, Dyer's poem on, quoted, 156.  
 — and Charles and Mary, 552, 601, 670.  
 Socrates, his gastronomic taste, 518.  
 Solitude in childhood, Lamb on, 29, 31.  
*Some Account of the Conversion of the Late William Hone*, 1853, and Lamb and his snuff-box, 552.  
*Some Enquiries into the Effects of Fermented Liquors*, by Basil Montagu, 331, 336.  
 Song of Solomon, 50.  
 "Sonnet in Dugdale," by Thomas Warton, quoted, 344, footnote.  
*Sonnets*, by Edward Moxon, 648, 649, 650.  
*Sonnets*, by Wordsworth, Lamb's admiration for, 306.  
 Sophocles, his gastronomic taste, 518.  
 South-Sea House, Samuel Salt a director of, 8.  
 — — — Charles Lamb's clerkship there, 1791, 70, 71, 72.  
 — — — John Lamb's early employment there, 73.  
 — — — Lamb's *Elia* essay on, 73, 74, 442.  
 — — — Lamb's departure from, 1792, 73, 75.  
 — — — and the clerks at "Mr. H.," 276.  
 — — — the clerks and John Lamb, 373.  
 — — — Lamb's later visits there, 442.  
 — — — and John Lamb and Samuel Salt, 471.  
 — — — John Lamb's position and residence there, 472.  
 — — — in the present day, 545.  
 Southampton Buildings, 34, the Lambs lodging there, 1800, 183.  
 — — the Lambs at, 1809, 294.  
 — — the Lambs lodging at (at the Misses Buffam's), in 1830, 628.  
 — — Lamb sleeping at, 1834, 662.  
 Southern, Henry, the *London Magazine* sold to, 442, 521.  
 Southey, Edith, Lamb's sonnet to, 648.  
 — Lieutenant, Southey's brother, 226.

- Southey, Robert, 1.  
 — — and Pantisocracy, 67.  
 — — his first meeting with Coleridge, 67.  
 — — first meeting with Lamb, 1795, 84.  
 — — his condition at the age of twenty, 84.  
 — — and Coleridge and Robert Lovell, 84.  
 — — completes with Coleridge the scheme of Pantisocracy, 84.  
 — — his mission on behalf of Sarah Fricker, 84.  
 — — on the Lamb family in 1794-95, 84, 85.  
 — — on the intimate friendship of Lamb and White, 85.  
 — — on the authorship of the *Falstaff Letters*, 85.  
 — — his "Joan of Arc" and Coleridge's *Vision*, 88.  
 — — his quarrel with Coleridge, 103.  
 — — at Lisbon, 1795, 103.  
 — — his reconciliation with Coleridge, 103.  
 — — visited by Lamb and Lloyd, 121.  
 — — and the Higginbottom sonnets, 124, footnote.  
 — — and the sonnet "To Simplicity," Coleridge on, 131.  
 — — and the *Anti-Jacobin* attacks, 136, 137.  
 — — and *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 138.  
 — — in 1798-99, 141.  
 — — Lamb's letters to, in 1798, 141, 142, 143.  
 — — an intellectual stimulus to Lamb, 141.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, January 21st, 1799, 168.  
 — — and Charles and Robert Lloyd, 169.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, October 31st, 1799, 174.  
 — — Rickman intimate with, 187.  
 — — his secretaryship to Isaac Corry procured by Rickman, 188.  
 — — on Rickman, 188.  
 — — on Lamb and Fell, 202.  
 — — introduces Burnett to Coleridge, 207.  
 — — *Life and Letters of*, 207.  
 — — at Dublin, 1801, 214.  
 — — and Rickman, 214.  
 — — on *John Woodvil*, 214.  
 — — on Lamb and the newspapers, 214.  
 — — on Godwin and Defoe, 214.  
 — — and Mrs. Barbauld's supposed attack on *John Woodvil*, 226.  
 — — with the Lambs at Sadler's Wells, 241.  
 — — and his little daughter, 241.  
 Southey, Robert, on the necessaries for a perfect house, 241.  
 — — and Coleridge's unhappy state, 245.  
 — — Coleridge's letter to, February 20th, 1804, 245.  
 — — and Lamb's "Farewell to Tobacco," 261.  
 — — and Coleridge and his wife, 276.  
 — — his solicitude for Coleridge, 288.  
 — — and the *Dramatic Specimens*, 289, 290.  
 — — his *Curse of Kehama*, Lamb on, 305.  
 — — his *Thalaba*, Lamb on, 305.  
 — — at Lamb's, 1811, 311.  
 — — and William Blake, 311.  
 — — and Gifford, and Lamb's review of the *Excursion*, 345.  
 — — and Lamb's biography, 357.  
 — — his early poems, Lamb's praise of, 372.  
 — — and the *Quarterly Review*, 405.  
 — — Lamb's gift of his *Works* to, 405.  
 — — "Letter of Elia to," 456, 459, 508, 509, 510.  
 — — his fortune, 499, and footnote.  
 — — and Sara Coleridge, 501.  
 — — his review in the *Quarterly Review*, 508, 509.  
 — — Lamb on his attack, 508.  
 — — his pacificatory letter to Lamb, 512.  
 — — and Lamb's response, 513.  
 — — his praise of Lamb, 1830, 513, 514.  
 — — Lamb's letter to, August 10th, 1825, 553.  
 — — his grey hair and Lamb, 568.  
 — — and the *Times* and Hone's subscription, 624.  
 — — his poem in praise of Lamb, 1830, 626.  
 — — his call, 1830, and Mary's illness, 631.  
 — — Mrs., Southey's letter to, May, 1804, 290.  
 Southgate, Lamb's walk to, 343.  
 "Sparrow's Wedding, The," by John Lamb the elder, 84.  
*Specimens of English Prose-writers to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, by George Burnett, 209.  
 — — — — and Lamb's *Dramatic Specimens*, 210.  
*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare*, 210.  
 — — — — published, 289.  
 — — — — and Southey, 290.  
 — — — — establishes Lamb's reputation, 290.  
 — — — — its purpose, Lamb on, 291.



- Spenser, Edmund, Hazlitt on, 383.  
*Spirit of the Age, The*, by Hazlitt, 536, 537.  
 Sprats for supper, 599, 600.  
 Spring, Lamb on, 521, 562.  
 Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, 15, 17, 18.  
 Staël, Madame de, on Miss Bengier, 181.  
 Stafford, Marquis of, his collection of pictures, Lamb on, 310.  
 "Stage Illusion," by Lamb, 553.  
 Stamford, possibly the original home of the Lamb family, 2.  
 Stammering, Lamb's habit of, 56, 57.  
 — — and his dipping experience, 507, 508.  
 — — and Lamb, J. Fuller Russell on, 670.  
 Stanhope, Lord, "Citizen Stanhope," Dyer a tutor in his family, 164.  
 — — Dyer one of his legatees and executors, 164.  
 — — George Burnett a tutor to his sons, 207.  
 Stansfields, The, meet the Lambs at Robinson's, 307.  
 "Stanzas Meditated in the Cloisters of Christ's Hospital," by George Dyer, 156.  
 Starkey, Captain, Charles and Mary Lamb on, 40.  
*Statesman, The*, edited by John Fenwick, 202.  
 Steele, Richard, discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.  
 — — and Hazlitt's essay writing, 445.  
 Stephens, Kitty, her singing, 374.  
 Sterne, Laurence, 1.  
 — — discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.  
 Stevens, Lancelot Pepys, a schoolfellow of Lamb's, 69.  
 Stoddart, John, Lamb's bondsman at the India House, 76.  
 — — and Dyer's copy of Lamb's *Works*, 149.  
 — — his appointment in Malta, 241.  
 — — Mary Lamb on his failing, 243.  
 — — and Coleridge in Malta, 274.  
 — — and his sister's marriage, 284.  
 — — his disagreement with Hazlitt, 284.  
 — — at his sister's wedding, 289.  
 — — at Lamb's, 1820, 430.  
 — — and John Lamb's will, 483.  
 — — his son, Lamb's kindness to, 586.  
 — — Mrs., and Coleridge's visit to Malta, 246.  
 — — at Sarah Stoddart's wedding, 289.  
 — Sarah (Mrs. William Hazlitt), letter from Mary Lamb to, about Aunt Hetty and Mrs. Lamb, 17.  
 — — Mary Lamb's letter to, 1804, on Lamb's money, 89.  
 Stoddart, Sarah, Mary Lamb's letter to, on George Burnett, 209.  
 — — Mary Lamb's letter to, May, 1804, and Lamb and the *Post*, 223.  
 — — Mary Lamb's letters on her lovers, 243.  
 — — in Malta, 1804, 246.  
 — — Mary Lamb's letter to, March 27th, 1804, about Coleridge, 246.  
 — — her return to England, 1805, 262.  
 — — Mary Lamb's letters to, 1805, about Gum Boil and Tooth Ache, 262.  
 — — staying with the Lambs, 1806, 265.  
 — — and Hazlitt, 265.  
 — — Mary Lamb's letter to, February 20th, 1806, on Lamb's restlessness, 266, 267.  
 — — Mary Lamb's letter to, June 2nd, 1806, on *Tales from Shakespear*, 271, 272.  
 — — her flirtations, 272.  
 — — her engagement to Hazlitt, 283, 284.  
 — — Mary Lamb's anticipations of her wedding, 285, 286.  
 — — Lamb on her marriage, 286.  
 — — her wedding, 1808, 289.  
 — — Mary Lamb her bridesmaid, 289.  
 — — Lamb on the wedding, 289.  
 Stoke Newington and Dyer's visit to the Friends, 166.  
 — — Mrs. Barbauld and Dr. Aikin living at, 323.  
 Stonehenge, 298.  
 Stothard, Thomas, meets Lamb at Henry Rogers' rooms, 255.  
 — — his "Canterbury Pilgrims," Lamb on, 525.  
 — — Lamb's sonnet to, 659.  
 Strand, The, better to live in than on Skiddaw, 227.  
 "Strid, The," Wordsworth's poem, and Mary Lamb's joke on, 354.  
 Stuart, Daniel, editor of the *Morning Post*, 180.  
 — — rejects Lamb's Fragments of Burton, 180.  
 — — on Lamb, 215.  
 — — end of Lamb's connection with, 215.  
 — — his idea of remuneration, 218.  
 — — and the public, 220.  
 — — editor of *The Courier*, 245.  
 — — and Coleridge's return from Malta, 275.  
 Suett, Dicky, a favourite actor of Lamb's, 78.  
 Summer, Coleridge on, 562.  
 Sumner, Mary, stated to be Lamb's first love, 83, footnote.

- "Superannuated Man, The," by Lamb, 541.  
 Surrey Gaol, Horsemonger Lane, Leigh Hunt imprisoned at, 326.  
 "Susan Yates," by Charles Lamb, 2.  
 Susquehannah, The, and Coleridge's ideal community, 103.  
 "Sweep's Song," by William Blake, and Lamb, 525, 526.  
 Swift, Dean, 1.  
 — — discussed at Lamb's evenings, 378.  
 Swinburne, Mr. Algernon Charles, his praise of *Elia*, 447, 448.  
 — — — and Lamb's copy of *Wither*, 544.  
*Sylvia*, by George Darley, 441.
- T
- Table Book*, Hone's, 36.  
 — — — and Lamb's Garrick extracts, 552, 567.  
 — — — and Hood's caricature of Mary Lamb, 578, 579.  
 — — — and Lamb's "Defeat of Time," 579, 587.  
*Table Talk*, by S. T. Coleridge, quoted, 59, 643.  
 — — and Lamb, 667, footnote.  
 "Table Talk," by Lamb, in *The Examiner*, 326.  
 — — in *The Athenæum*, 658.  
*Tales from Shakespear*, suggested by Godwin, 179.  
 — — — Lamb on, 271.  
 — — — Mary Lamb on, 271.  
 — — — Martin Burney's attempt at, 272.  
 — — — Lamb on Mary's difficulty in, 273.  
 — — — their publication, 1807, 282.  
 — — — and Mrs. Godwin, 282.  
 — — — Lamb's share in, 282.  
 — — — and Mary Lamb's share in, 292.  
 — — — and Novello, 397.  
 "Tales of Lyddal Cross," by Allan Cunningham, and the *London Magazine*, 441.  
 Talfourd, T. N., on Lamb's thoughtfulness as a child, 38.  
 — — — and C. V. Le Grice, 61.  
 — — — and Le Grice's recollections of Lamb, 77.  
 — — — introduced to Lamb by William Evans, 91.  
 — — — his record of Lamb's "solemn engagement," 95.  
 — — — on Mary Lamb's serenity, 100.  
 — — — and Charles Lloyd's testimony, 100.  
 Talfourd, T. N., on Mary Lamb's calm recollections of her mother, 123.  
 — — — on Dyer and Lamb, 163.  
 — — — and Lloyd's account of Charles and Mary walking to Hoxton Asylum, 174.  
 — — — his story of Dr. Parr and Lamb's smoking, 240, 241.  
 — — — on the beauty of Mary Lamb's character, 244.  
 — — — on Mary Lamb's fine qualities, 244.  
 — — — and Miss Betham's anecdotes of Lamb, 287.  
 — — — Hazlitt described by, 318.  
 — — — on Barnes and Lamb, 319, 320.  
 — — — on Lamb's alcoholic excess, 338, 339.  
 — — — his first meeting with Lamb, 1815, 350.  
 — — — his description of Lamb, 350, 351.  
 — — — his "Essay on the Chief Living Poets," 351, 352.  
 — — — introduced by Lamb to Wordsworth, 352.  
 — — — at Lamb's, 354, 355.  
 — — — and Lamb's biography, 357.  
 — — — his presents to Lamb, 358, 359.  
 — — — at the Lambs, 362.  
 — — — and Lamb's jokes, 369.  
 — — — on Lamb's Thursday evenings, 373, 374, 375.  
 — — — and Wordsworth, 400.  
 — — — Crabb Robinson on, 404.  
 — — — on Lloyd, and Macready's acting, 411.  
 — — — and Lamb's joke on "sitting," 432.  
 — — — on Hazlitt and Lamb and the *London Magazine*, 434.  
 — — — on Scott's editorship, 434, 435.  
 — — — and Wainewright, 438, 439.  
 — — — and the editorship of the *London Magazine*, 461.  
 — — — his biography of Lamb reviewed by De Quincey, 466.  
 — — — on John Lamb, 476.  
 — — — in the "Letter of *Elia* to Southey," 509.  
 — — — and literary gossip, 511.  
 — — — his *Final Memorials*, 514.  
 — — — named as executor of Lamb's first will, 519.  
 — — — on Munden's retirement and Lamb, 526, 527.  
 — — — at Lamb's, 1824, 532.  
 — — — entertains the Lambs, 1824, 532.  
 — — — his *Lamb* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 567.

- Talfourd, T. N., and tobacco and Lamb, 573.
- — — his party and Lamb and Wordsworth, 595.
- — — on Lamb's playful rudeness to Mary, 598, 599.
- — — at Enfield, 1829, 609.
- — — Lamb on his children, 616.
- — — calls his child after Lamb, 617.
- — — Lamb's letter to, 1829, on his name-child, 617.
- — — on Hazlitt's death and Lamb, 631.
- — — co-trustee in Lamb's second will, 631.
- — — entertains Lamb and Miss Isola, 1832, 643.
- — — made a serjeant, 1833, 648.
- — — his supper-party to Lamb and Macready, 1834, 660.
- — — on Mary Lamb's "rambling chat" in her illnesses, 660.
- — — on Lamb after Coleridge's death, 666, 667.
- — — and Lamb's last dinner-party, 673, 674.
- — — on Lamb's illness and death, 674, 675.
- — — his biography of Lamb and the Lamb-Wordsworth letters, 675.
- — — on Mary Lamb and Charles's death, 681, 682.
- — — on Mary Lamb's pecuniary circumstances, 682.
- — — wishes Mary Lamb to leave Edmonton, 1835, 684.
- — — Procter's letter to, June 22nd, 1841, 685.
- Mrs., at Lamb's, 532.
- Talma, the tragedian, Lamb supping with, 488.
- Tasso, Mary Lamb reading, 648.
- and Charles and Mary, 657.
- Tatler, *The*, 1830, and Cowden Clarke on Lamb, 580.
- Taylor, Ann, and Jane, and the *Original Poems*, 296.
- Sir Henry, his correspondence and Miss Perry's letter, 399.
- — — at Coleridge's party, 528.
- — — Crabb Robinson on, 528.
- — — and the turban, 528.
- — — his *Philip Van Artevelde*, Lamb on, 671.
- Bishop, his bust at All Souls', Oxford, Lamb on, 184.
- — and Burnett's *Specimens of Prose*, 209.
- John, of the *London Magazine*, 436.
- Taylor, John, and Lamb, 436.
- — identifies Junius, 437.
- — Lamb's letter to, July, 1821, 442, 453.
- — at Colebrooke, 529.
- — and the decline of the *London*, 535.
- — his claim in the *Last Essays of Elia*, and Lamb, 647.
- — and his lawsuit with Moxon, 647.
- William, of Norwich, Southey introduced to by George Burnett, 207.
- — — meets Lamb at Robinson's, 307.
- Temperance, Lamb on, 302.
- Temple, The, birthplace of Lamb, 1.
- — iron gates of, 1.
- — Church, Lamb's childish impressions, 44.
- — influence on Lamb as a child, 61.
- — the Lambs at 16 Mitre Court Buildings, 198.
- — Crabb Robinson living in, 337.
- — Mary Lamb's love of, 368.
- — reason of the Lambs leaving, 388.
- — the Lambs leave, 390.
- — the Benchers and Mrs. Norris, 576.
- Temple Bar, M. E. W.'s lines on Charles Lamb in, 409.
- Tennyson, Alfred, his *Poems*, published by Moxon, 627.
- — and Jerdan's review of, 627.
- — his poems, Crabb Robinson on, 651.
- — his poems, Lamb's good opinion of, 671.
- Thackeray, William Makepeace, and "Saint Charles," 533, 534.
- Thalaba, by Southey, Lamb on, 305.
- Thames, The, and Lamb's holiday, 1804, 247.
- — Lamb on, 489.
- Thames Street, a favourite with Lamb, 344.
- Thanet, Isle of, Mary Lamb on, 242.
- "That Home is Home though it is never so Homely," by Lamb, 401.
- "That We should Lie Down with the Lamb," by Lamb, 484.
- "That We should Rise with the Lark," by Lamb, 484, 546.
- Theatre, The, Lamb's first visit to, 43.
- — Charles and Mary at, described in "Old China," 173.
- — Charles and Mary at Sadler's Wells, 241.
- — at Covent Garden, 309.
- — at the Lyceum, 309.
- — Lamb on, 325, 362.



- Theatre, The, Kean in "Richard II.," 355.
- — Munden's retirement, 526, 527.
- — and Miss Isola, 527.
- Theatrum Postarum Anglicanorum*, by Phillips, and Lamb, 674.
- "Thekla's Song" (Schiller), Lamb's version of, 181.
- Thelwall, John, "Citizen," Lamb's endeavour to see, 121.
- — visits Coleridge at Stowey, 137.
- — and Rickman, 187.
- — his imprisonment, 231.
- — in 1818, 426.
- — his *Champion* and Lamb's epigrams in, 426.
- — tabooed, 457.
- "Theses Quædam Theologicæ," by Lamb, sent to Coleridge, 133.
- — — sent to Southey, 142.
- "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison," by Coleridge, 117.
- — — Coleridge's note on Charles and Mary in 1834, 134, 667.
- Thompson, Marmaduke, at the Lambs, 183.
- Thomson, James, his grave at Richmond, 224.
- Thornton, Sir Edward, a schoolfellow of Lamb's, 69.
- "Thoughts on Presents of Game," by Lamb, 544, 658.
- Thurlow, E. H., his sonnet on the heron, 469.
- Thursday evenings, Lamb's, 373 and on, 515.
- Ticknor, George, in London in 1819, 424.
- "Tiger, The," by William Blake, Lamb's praise of, 525.
- Time, Lamb on, 493, 612.
- Times*, *The*, and Crabb Robinson and Walter, 306.
- — Thomas Barnes editor of, 319.
- — and Alsager, 354.
- — Barron Field dramatic critic to, 357.
- — on the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- — and Southey's poem on Lamb, 514, 626.
- — and the public subscription for Hone, 624.
- — and Lamb's sonnet to Samuel Rogers, 659.
- Tipp, John, accountant of the South-Sea House, and John Lamb, 472.
- Titian, Lamb on, 261, 268, 310, 383, 525.
- "Titus Andronicus," 303.
- "To Emma Isola," poem by W. S. Landor, 646.
- "To Emma Learning Latin," by Mary Lamb, 583, 584.
- "To a Friend who asked, How I felt when the Nurse first presented my Infant to me," by Coleridge, 109.
- "To a Friend who has declared his Intention of Writing no more Poetry," by Coleridge, 104, 105.
- "To Simplicity," by Coleridge, quoted (Coleridge's Higginbottom sonnet), 124.
- "To the Sister of Elia," by W. S. Landor, 681.
- "To a Young Friend on his Proposing to Domesticate with the Author," by S. T. Coleridge, 109.
- "Toad or Frog?" (Godwin's question), 179.
- Tobacco and Lamb, 239, 240, 333, 334, 573.
- the acquirement of the habit, 240.
- his excess in, 240.
- its pleasant effect, 243.
- his "Farewell to Tobacco," 261, 598.
- giving up, 266, 273, 349, 351, 363, 368, 372, 573.
- Mary Lamb on, 266, 271.
- on the charms of, 365.
- in his later years, Mrs. Coe's testimony and Talfourd's, 573.
- and Macready on Lamb's wish, 1834, 660.
- Tobin, James, and Coleridge at Barnard's Inn, 245.
- John, the dramatist, Miss Benger's biography of, 181.
- "Tom Bowling," by Charles Dibdin, 504.
- "Tom Pry," by Charles Lamb, and Poole's "Paul Pry," 490.
- Tomalin meets Lamb at Robinson's, 307.
- and Coleridge's lectures, 307.
- Tonna, Mrs., sister of J. B. Dibdin, her account of the beginning of his friendship with Lamb, 504.
- Tooke, Horne, his imprisonment, 231.
- Tottenham and the Lambs' walks, 365.
- Tour through the Batavian Republic*, by R. Fell, 202.
- Tradespeople and the Lambs, 610.
- Trimmer, Mrs., Lamb on her books for children, 232.
- — and reading for the young, 589.
- Trinity College, Cambridge, Lamb's liking for, 432.
- Tripe and Lamb, 650.
- Tristram Shandy*, 57, 185, 366.
- "Triumph of Poetry, The," by George Dyer, quoted, 157.
- Trollope, A. W., his *History of Christ's Hospital*, 47, 54.
- — — succeda Boyer, 59.

Truth for Truth's sake, Carlyle on, 638.  
 Tucker's *Light of Nature Revealed*, Hazlitt's abridgement of, 249, 262.  
 Tunbridge Wells, The Lambs at, 505.  
 "Turkies," Crabb Robinson's gifts of, 315, 616.  
 Turnips, Lamb's fondness for, 573.  
 — and boiled mutton, Lamb's joke on, 621.  
 Tuthill, Dr., afterwards Sir George, his defeat at St. Luke's Hospital, 309.  
 — — and Lamb's release from the India House, 536.  
 Twain, Mark, his famous pleasantry, 308, footnote.  
 Tween, Arthur, and Charles, their marriage to the Misses Norris, 575.  
 — Charles, on Lamb's small figure, 575.  
 — Jane (daughter of Randal Norris), her account of Mrs. Bartram and her daughters, 83.  
 — — on the Lambs' visit to France, 487, 488.  
 "Twelfth Night," and Lamb's memory, 78.  
 — — compared with Titian, 268.  
 "Twelfth Night, Fable for," by Lamb, 215.  
*Twelve Sonnets and an Epilogue*, by Thomas Westwood, 591.  
 Twichell, Rev. Joseph, and Mr. Ogilvie's reminiscences of Lamb, 544.  
 "Two Races of Men, The," by Lamb, 200.  
 "Two Thieves, The; or, The Last Stage of Avarice," by Wordsworth, 344.

## U

Udall, Mrs., linen draper at Winchmore Hill, and Lamb, 597.  
 Ulswater, the home of the Clarksons, Charles and Mary at, 228.  
 Uncle Toby (*Tristram Shandy*), Lamb on Joseph Cottle's likeness to, 185.  
 Unitarianism, Lamb's nominal creed, 90.  
 — and G. D.'s tract, Lamb on, 637.  
 — and Lamb's open letter to the *London Magazine*, 1825, 637.  
 — and his letter to Miss Hutchinson, 1825, 637.  
 — Coleridge's later hostility to, 1833, 637.  
*Urn Burial*, by Sir Thomas Browne, Lamb on, 381.

## V

Vale, Miss Louisa, of Enfield, her recollection of Lamb, 592.  
 Valpy, James, his edition of the classics edited by Dyer, 158, 408.

Valpy, Philarète Chasles meets Lamb at his office, 407, 408.  
 Versailles, the Kenneys living at, 487.  
 — Lamb's wife there, 491.  
 Viands, Lamb and his favourite, 194, 260, 261, 279, 650.  
 Vindicator, his letter in defence of Lamb, 339, 340.  
 "Vindictive Man, The," by Holcroft, its failure, 276.  
 Virgil's tomb, Lamb and the acorns from, 651.  
 "Vision, The," by Coleridge, 88.  
 "Vision of Judgment," by Lord Byron, Lamb on, 499, 670.  
 — — by Southey, Lamb on, 499.  
 "Visit to the Cousins, The," by Mary Lamb, 39, 44, 292.  
*Visit to Paris in 1814*, by John Scott, 434.  
 Visitors, the plague of, Lamb on, 402, 403, 404.  
 Voltaire, his tales, and Lamb on, 362.  
 — and Lamb's evenings, 387.  
 — Lamb on, 392, 393.

## W

*Waggoner, The*, by Wordsworth, dedicated to Charles Lamb, 418.  
 — — Lamb on, 418, 419.  
 Wainwright, Thomas Griffiths ("Janus Weathercock"), 438, 439.  
 — — — Talfourd on, 438.  
 — — — and Blake, 438, 526.  
 — — — and Lamb's recommendation of to Moxon, 439.  
 — — — and Lamb's ghost, 439.  
 — — — his crimes and death, 439.  
 — — — and Lytton and Dickens, 440.  
 — — — on Clare and Lamb, 440.  
 — — — and the *London Magazine*, 441.  
 — — — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.  
 Wakefield, Gilbert, and Lamb's *faux pas*, 465.  
 Waldens, The, of Bay Cottage, Church Street, Edmonton, 652.  
 — — Charles moves with Mary to, 652.  
 — — Mr. H. F. Cox's account of, 653.  
 — — Mrs. Walden's temper and Mary Lamb's kindness, 685.  
 Wales, Prince of (Prince Regent), and Lamb's "Triumph of the Whale," 320, 321, 322, 329.  
 — — — Leigh Hunt's article on, 322.  
 — — — and Lamb's "love" for, 324.  
 — — — Lamb's epigrams on, 426, 427.  
 — — — Coleridge's feeling against, 426.  
 — — — Lamb's hatred of, 455.

- Walking, Lamb and, 486, 580, 596, 597, 600, 612.  
 Walpole, Horace, 1.  
 Waltham and walks to, 172.  
 Walton, Izaak, Lamb's eulogy of, 103.  
 — — and Burnett's *Specimens of Prose*, 209.  
 — — and Lamb on, 486.  
 — — and Thomas Westwood, 575, 590.  
 Wandering Jew, The, and Martin Burney's wish to see, 383.  
 Wapping, the birthplace of George Dyer, 144.  
 Ward, Robert, afterwards Plumer Ward, 25.  
 Wardour Street and Lamb, 650.  
 Warren, Samuel, his meeting with Lamb, 662.  
 Warton, Thomas, his "Sonnet in Dugdale," Lamb's praise of, 344.  
 Wasps and Lamb, 579, 580.  
*Watchman, The*, its existence ended, 88.  
 Waterloo Place, No. 13, dinners of the *London Magazine* at, 437.  
 Wawd, of the India House, Lamb's couplet on, 545.  
 "Way of the World, The," Lamb's third play, 144.  
 Webster, his "White Devil," Lamb reading, 262.  
 — Daniel, Lamb on, 386.  
 "Wedding, The," by Lamb, 461.  
 — — Wordsworth's preference for, 648.  
 Wednesday evenings, the Lambs', 293, 311, 316, 319, 373 and on. See also Thursday evenings.  
 Weight, Mr. and Mrs., and the Lamb family in 1794, 75.  
 Wem, in Shropshire, Hazlitt's parental home, 248.  
 Wesley, Miss Sarah, daughter of Charles Wesley, 180, 181.  
 West, Sir Algernon, his *Reminiscences*, 377.  
 — Benjamin, and "Pink" De Quincey's admiration of, 269.  
 West Hill Green, Buntingford, Lamb's property at, 325.  
 Westall, William, meets Lamb at Henry Rogers' rooms, 255.  
 Westminster Abbey and the memorial to Novello, 398.  
 — — the Musical Festival at, 1834, Lamb on, 666.  
 — Bridge and Wordsworth, 422, 428.  
 Westmorland, Lamb on the caves of, 469.  
 Westwood, Francis, at Miss Vale's school, 592.  
 — Thomas, the elder, and his son's future, 592.  
 Westwood, Thomas, the elder, the Lambs lodging with, 613, 614.  
 — — — — described by Lamb, 614, 615, 616.  
 — — the younger, his *Chronicle of the Compleat Angler*, and Lamb, 575, 590.  
 — — — — his reminiscences of the Lambs, 588, 589, 590.  
 — — — — the Lambs' kindness to, 588, 589, 590.  
 — — — — and Lamb's books, 589, 591.  
 — — — — taught Latin by Mary Lamb, 590.  
 — — — — and the *Bibliotheca Piscatoria*, 590, 591.  
 — — — — his *Twelve Sonnets and an Epilogue*, and Lamb and Walton, 591.  
 — — — — and Landor, 592.  
 — — — — his death, 592.  
 — — — — Lamb procures a situation for, 637.  
 — — — — on the Lambs at Edmonton, 672.  
 — — — — catches frogs for Miss Kelly, 672.  
 — — — — Bridget Elia's carpenter, 672.  
 Westwoods, The, their extortions, 633.  
 — — and Wordsworth's excess in sugar, 633.  
 — — described by Crabb Robinson, 637.  
 — — the beginning of Lamb's dislike of, 644, 651.  
 — — the Lambs leave, 652.  
 Westwood Cottage in the present day, 613, 617.  
 Whale, The, at Margate, Lamb on, 464.  
 Whateley, Joseph, former vicar of Widford, 37.  
 — Archbishop, his son, husband of Jane Plumer, 37.  
 Wheatley, Kitty, of Widford, 37.  
 Whist, Lamb on, 234.  
 — at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 373, 375.  
 White, Blanco, and Coleridge's invitation to meet Lamb, 555.  
 — James, one of Lamb's bondsmen at the India House, 76.  
 — — a schoolfellow of Lamb's, 85.  
 — — in the treasurer's office at Christ's Hospital, 85.  
 — — and the *Falstaff Letters*, 85.  
 — — J. M. Gutch on, 85.  
 — — described by Lamb in "The Praise of Chimney Sweepers," 86, 87.  
 — — as a friend, 127, 143, 175, 183.  
 — — Lloyd living with, 1798, 129.



- White, James, Lamb staying with, 1800, 183.
- — and Robert Lloyd, 295.
- — and Lamb's lottery puffs, 299.
- — at Lamb's party, 1815, 355.
- — at Lamb's Thursday evenings, 379.
- — his death, 466.
- — his *Falstaff's Letters* given by Lamb to Landor, 645.
- "White Devil, The," by Webster, Lamb reading, 262.
- Widford, 36.
- and Lamb's sonnets, 81.
- and *Rosamund Gray*, 139.
- the Norrises living there, 571, 572.
- Lamb's later visits to, 571.
- "Wife, The," by J. Sheridan Knowles, Lamb's prologue and epilogue to, 652.
- "Wife's Trial, The," by Charles Lamb, 583, 584.
- — — published in *Blackwood*, 603.
- — — and Lamb on *Blackwood's* payment, 603.
- Wight, Isle of, the Lambs' visit to, with the Burneys, 242.
- — Lamb on, 243.
- Wild Oats*, by O'Keeffe, mentioned by Lamb, 525.
- Wilde, Sergeant (afterwards Lord Truro), and Martin Burney, 235.
- — Lamb's election squibs for, 618.
- Wilkinson, Thomas, of Yanwath, Charles Lloyd with, 109.
- Wilkie, David, R.A., his friendship for Haydon, 317.
- Will, Lamb's first, 519.
- Lamb's second, 631.
- William IV. and Coleridge's pension, 635.
- Williams, Dr., his library, and the Crabb Robinson papers, 305.
- the Ratcliffe Highway murderer, and Dyer, 163.
- Mrs., of Fornham, and Miss Isola's situation with, 595.
- — — and Emma Isola's illness, 620.
- — — Lamb's letters to, 620, 621.
- — — her verses, Lamb on, 621.
- — — Lamb's acrostics for, 621.
- Willis, Nathaniel Parker, and *Elia* in America, and Lamb, 603.
- — — his *Pencilings by the Way*, 663.
- — — and Landor and Crabb Robinson, 663.
- — — his account of Crabb Robinson's breakfast and the Lambs, 663, 664, 665.
- — — and *Elia*, 665.
- Willis, Nathaniel Parker, his enthusiasm for Lamb's writings, 665.
- Wilson, Professor, "Christopher North," and Sir Walter Scott, 270.
- — his *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, 436.
- — on *Elia*, 436.
- — his "Metricum Symposium" and Lamb, 436.
- — and Lamb and his work, 436.
- — on the "Letter of *Elia* to Southey," 510.
- — his meeting with Lamb, 1832, 643.
- — his benediction on Lamb, 643.
- Wilson, Walter, biographer of Defoe, Lamb's letter to, 1801, 210.
- Wiltshire, the Lambs' visit to, 298.
- Wimborne and Mary Druiitt, 223.
- Winchmore Hill and Lamb's walks, 596, 597.
- — and Lamb on the music at Westminster Abbey, 666.
- Windham, William, M.P., and John Lamb, 307, 478, 479, 480.
- Windsor, Mary Lamb at, 341.
- Wine, Lamb on, 622, 650.
- Winter, Lamb on, 520.
- Winterslow, the home of the William Hazlitts, 295.
- the Lambs at, 1809 and 1810, 298.
- "Wishing Cap, The," by Leigh Hunt, and the Lambs' visits to Hunt in prison, 326, 327.
- — — Lamb described, 514, 515.
- "Witch Aunt, The," by Lamb, 14, 20, 292.
- "Witches and other Night Fears," by Lamb, 18, 460.
- Wither, George, Lamb on, 142.
- — Southey's liking for, 261.
- — Lamb's copy of, printed by J. M. Gutch, 544.
- Wodd, Henry, clerk at the East India House. See Wawd.
- Woman, her duty and domestic ambition, Mary Lamb on, 348.
- Wood, Alderman, Queen Caroline's friend, Lamb's sonnet to, 426.
- Woodbridge in Suffolk, and Bernard Barton, 493.
- Woolman, John, the *Journal* of, introduced to Lamb by C. Lloyd, 113.
- — — its influence on Lamb, 113, 114.
- — — Lamb on, 1834, 664.
- Wordsworth, Christopher, marries Priscilla Lloyd, 139.
- — his home at Binfield, 301.
- Dorothy, at Racedown with Wordsworth, 90.
- — meets Lamb at Stowey, 1797, 117.

- Wordsworth, Dorothy, described by Coleridge, 119.
- — Lamb's letter to, 1798, 131.
- — Lamb sends his play to, 180.
- — in 1801, 196.
- — Mary Lamb's letter to, July 9th, 1803, 241.
- — and Mary Lamb's poems, 247.
- — Mary Lamb's letter and poem to, May 7th, 1805, 257, 258.
- — Lamb's letter to, June 14th, 1805, 258.
- — her two letters to Mary Lamb, 1808, 288.
- — her deep interest in the Lambs, 301.
- — her visit to the Lambs, 1810, 301.
- — the Lambs' joint letters to, November 13th, November 23rd, 1810, 302.
- — Mary Lamb's letter to, 1817, about Brighton, 372.
- — the Lambs' letter to, November 21st, 1817, after moving to Great Russell Street, 390.
- — Lamb's letter to, November 25th, 1819, describing Willy Wordsworth, 421.
- — Lamb's letter to, January, 1820, on butcher's meat, 431.
- — Lamb's letter to, January 8th, 1821, on "New Year's Eve," 460.
- — on the death of John Lamb, 465.
- — on the *Essays of Elia*, 465.
- — Crabb Robinson's letter to, October 31st, 1823, 511, 519.
- — Crabb Robinson's letter to, November 2nd, 1825, 555.
- — Mary Lamb's postscript to, January 22nd, 1830, 619.
- — Crabb Robinson's letter to, March, 1832, 642.
- — Mr. Gordon, and the Lamb-Wordsworth correspondence, 675.
- — Captain John, the poet's brother, his death, 257.
- — — his character in "The Happy Warrior," 257.
- — — Lamb on, 257.
- — — Mary Lamb's poem on, 258.
- — William, 1.
- — on Lamb and holy orders, 57.
- — at the age of twenty-six, 90.
- — his first meeting with Coleridge, 90.
- — meets Lamb at Stowey, 1797, 117.
- — Hazlitt's description of, 118, 119.
- — moves to Alfoxden, 120.
- — his partnership, with Coleridge in *Lyrical Ballads*, 120.
- Wordsworth, William, his "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew Tree," 120, footnote.
- — and his sister with Coleridge in Germany, 132.
- — and *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 138.
- — and his sister separate from Coleridge in Germany, 142.
- — "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," Lamb's praise of, 142.
- — on *Dyer's Life of the Rev. Robert Robinson*, 148.
- — Lamb sends his play to, 180.
- — living at Grasmere with his sister, 196.
- — sends the *Lyrical Ballads* to Lamb, 196.
- — offended by Lamb's criticism, 197.
- — and *John Woodvil*, 197.
- — his letter of castigation to Lamb, 197.
- — his continued correspondence with Lamb, 198.
- — Lamb visits his cottage, 1802, 228.
- — with his sister in London, 229.
- — his sonnet on Westminster Bridge, 229.
- — with Lamb at Bartholomew Fair, 229.
- — his marriage, 1802, 229.
- — and his little son, 241.
- — his portrait painted by Hazlitt, 249.
- — corresponding with De Quincey, 252.
- — his "Happy Warrior," 257.
- — his brother's death, 1805, the Lambs' sympathy on, 257, 258.
- — Lamb sends him the "Farewell to Tobacco," 261.
- — and the "dual unity" of Charles and Mary, 269.
- — Lamb tells him of "Mr. H.," 1806, 272.
- — Lamb tells him of the *Tales from Shakespear*, 273.
- — and Coleridge and his wife, 276.
- — and the *Tales from Shakespear*, 282.
- — and the ease with which he could write like Shakespeare if he had the mind, 287.
- — his anxiety for Coleridge, 288.
- — introduced by Lamb to Crabb Robinson, 1808, 289.
- — Crabb Robinson's admiration for, 289.
- — and Coleridge, Lamb on, 305, 306.

- Wordsworth, William, his "Hart-leap Well," Lamb's praise of, 306.
- — his "Leech Gatherer," Lamb on, 306.
- — his breach with Coleridge, 308, 323.
- — his "Peter Bell," Lamb on, 324.
- — Lamb and Barnes dispute over, 322.
- — reconciled with Coleridge through Robinson, 324.
- — Lamb's letter to, about stimulants, 337.
- — his "Daffodils," Robinson's fondness for, 344.
- — his "Two Thieves," Lamb's liking for, 344.
- — Lamb's letter to, August 9th, 1814, about the fête, 345.
- — and Lamb and the *Excursion*, 345, 354.
- — Lamb's letters to, in April, 1815, on India House slavery, 352, 353.
- — his *Poems*, 1815 edition, Lamb's criticism of, 353, 354.
- — his poem "The Strid," and Mary Lamb's joke on, 354.
- — his "Letter to a Friend of Burns" and his "Thanksgiving Ode," and Lamb, 364.
- — Lamb's letter to, September 23rd, 1816, describing a holiday, Hazlitt's attack on Coleridge, and Gifford's further insolence, 365, 366, 367.
- — Hazlitt's hostile attitude to, 370.
- — and Hazlitt's attack on, 372.
- — and Hazlitt's attack on Coleridge, 372.
- — and Coleridge and *The Excursion*, 372.
- — Lamb's manner to, 376, 377.
- — and Hazlitt's quarrel with Lamb, 388.
- — at Haydon's party, 1817, 392, 393, 394, 395.
- — and the Comptroller of Stamps, 393, 394.
- — at Lamb's, 1817, 399, 400.
- — and Talfourd, 404.
- — Lamb's gift of his *Works* to, 405.
- — Lamb's letter to, April 26th, 1819, on "Peter Bell," 410.
- — dedicates his *Waggoner* to Lamb, 418.
- — in 1820, Crabb Robinson on, 427, 428.
- — Lamb on, 432.
- — Lamb's letter to, March 20th, 1822, after John Lamb's death, 483, 485.
- Wordsworth, William, at Monkhouse's dinner-party, 1823, 501, 502, 503.
- — and Moore, 502.
- — in the "Letter of Elia to Southey," 510.
- — his "Poet's Epitaph" and Lamb, 524.
- — contrasted with Manning, 528.
- — Lamb's letter to, April, 1825, after his release, 540.
- — Lamb's letter to, September 26th, 1826, introducing Moxon, 563.
- — and Lamb on moving, 579.
- — at Enfield, Thomas Westwood on, 590.
- — and Lamb at Talfourd's party, 595.
- — Lamb's letter to, January 22nd, 1830, on Enfield and the Westwoods, 613.
- — his visit to Lamb and excess in sugar, 1831, 633.
- — and Lamb's *Last Essays of Elia*, 648.
- — and porter, 651.
- — Lamb's letter to, May, 1833, on the move to Edmonton, 652.
- — Crabb Robinson's letter to, November, 1833, 658.
- — on his delight in Lamb's works, 658.
- — Lamb's last letter to, 1834, 662.
- — his "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg," and the deaths of Coleridge and Lamb, 669.
- — Lamb's praise of, 671.
- — and Lamb's epitaph, 675-79, 684.
- — and Lamb's letters to, 675.
- — his praise of Mary Lamb, 676, 677.
- — and the memorial to Charles Lamb in Edmonton Church, 680.
- — Mrs., and Mary Lamb's inquiries after, 289.
- — and Crabb Robinson, 355.
- — Lamb's letter to, February 18th, 1818, on the plague of visitors, 401, 402, 403, 404.
- — at Monkhouse's dinner-party, 502.
- — William, the younger, Lamb on, 421, 422, 423.
- Wordsworths, The, their Scotch tour and Coleridge, 245.
- — Coleridge nursed by, 245.
- — at Anthony Robinson's, 324.
- — in London, 1815, 354.
- — at the theatre, 355.
- Work, Lamb on over-work and no-work, 612.



- Works*, 1818, of Charles Lamb, 80, 129, 184.  
 — Dyer's copy of, given by Lamb to Stoddart, 149.  
 — and Ayrton's MS. volume, 176, 237.  
 — the second volume dedicated to Martin Burney, 235.  
 — and *The Reflector*, 304.  
 — refused by Murray, 367.  
 — published by the Olliers, 367, 405, 406.  
 — Lamb's gifts of, 405.  
 — and Leigh Hunt, 406.  
 — and the sonnet to Miss Kelly, 412.  
 — Lamb on his, at the India House, 542.  
 Wright, Walter, author of *Horæ Ionicæ*, meets the Lambs at the Colliers, 310.
- Wroughton and Tom Sheridan and Lamb's collaboration, 292.  
 Wyatt of the Wells and Lamb, 566.
- Y
- Yarmouth, Burnett and Southey at, 207.  
*Year-Book*, Hone's, 441, 551, 635.  
 Yeats, Timothy, Lamb's guarantor at Christ's Hospital, 46.  
 Yorick and James Elia, Lamb on, 472.  
 York Street, Westminster, No. 19, Milton's house, Hazlitt living there, 316.  
 Young, Sir William, his pictures, 268.
- Z
- Zadig*, and Landor on Elia, 645.  
 "Zapolya," by S. T. Coleridge, 363.



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	PAGE		PAGE
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Ancient Cities . . . . .	13	Miniature Library . . . . .	20
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Arden Shakespeare . . . . .	14	New Library of Music . . . . .	21
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Little Books on Art . . . . .	18	Fiction . . . . .	25
Little Galleries . . . . .	18	Books for Boys and Girls . . . . .	30
Little Guides . . . . .	18	Shilling Novels . . . . .	30
Little Library . . . . .	19	Sevenpenny Novels . . . . .	31



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